MANY LAGOONS

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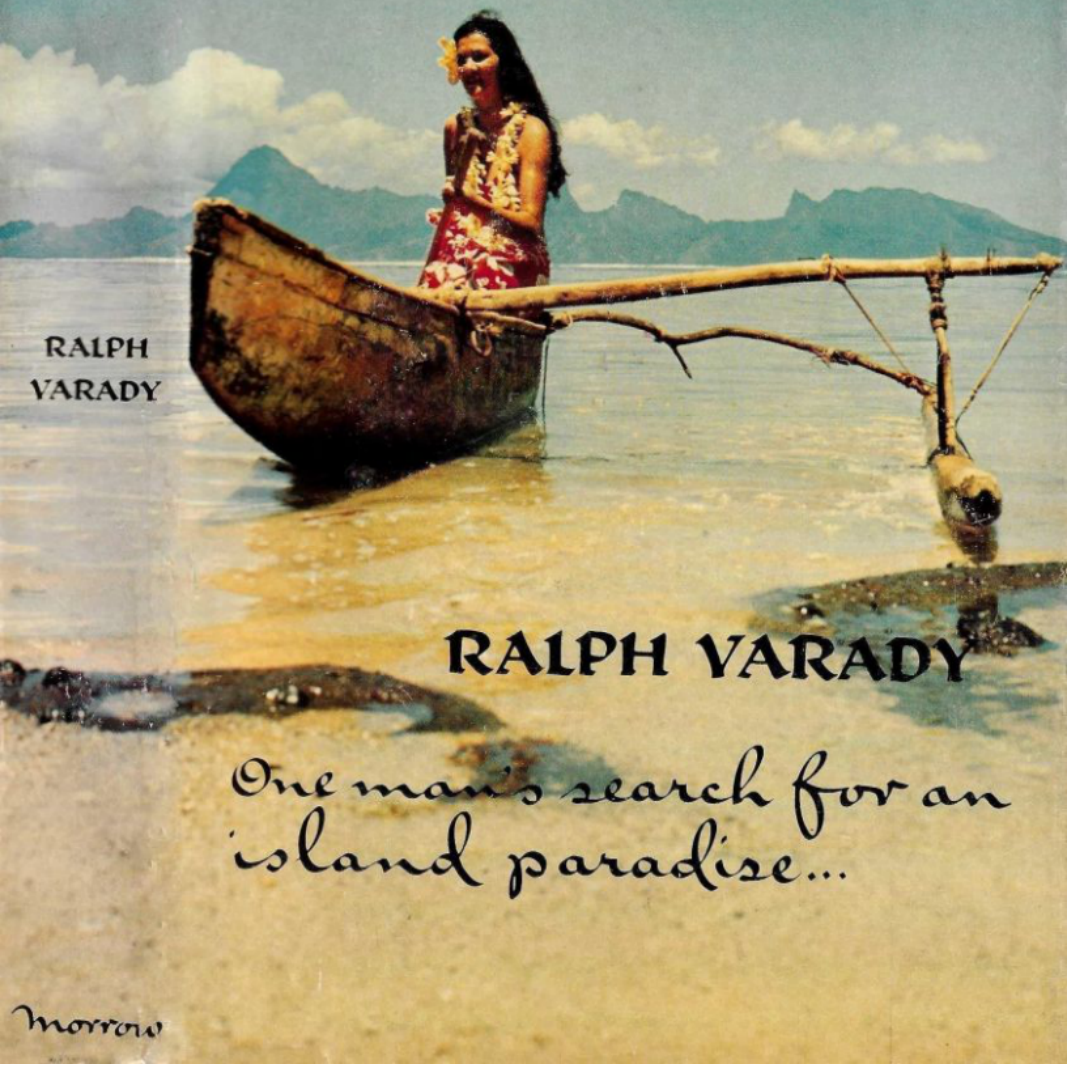

RALPH VARADY

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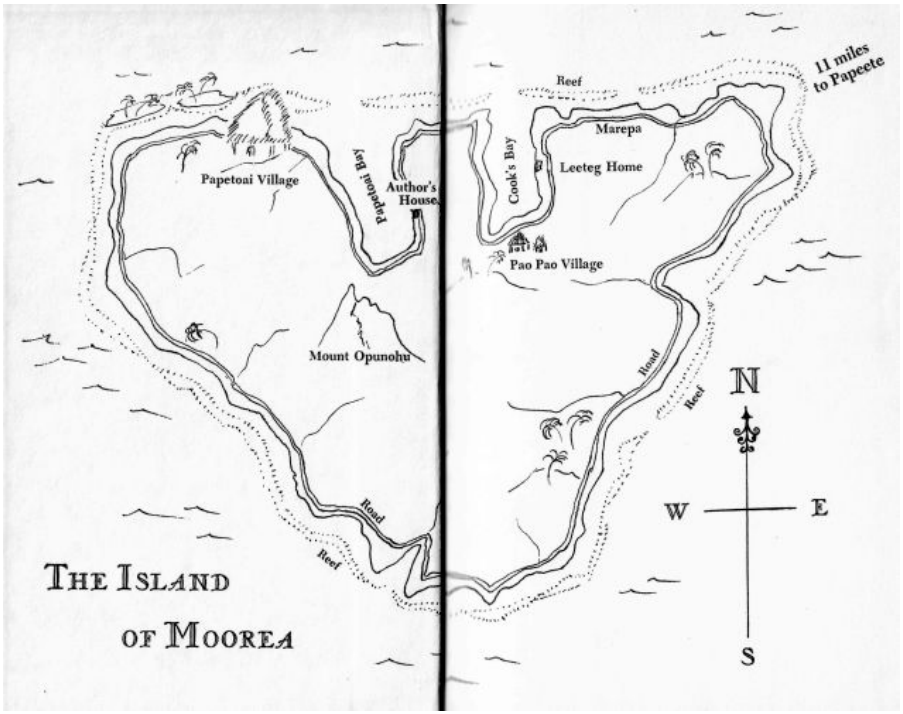
One man's search for an island paradise...

Morrow


Reef
11 miles
to Papeete
Marepa
Cook's Bay
Leeteg Home
Papetoai Village
Papetoai Bay
Author's
House
Pao Pao Village
Mount Opunohu
Road
Reef
N
W
E
S
Road
Reef
THE ISLAND
OF MOOREA

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MANY LAGOONS

by

RALPH VARANDY

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INTRODUCTION

At some time or other, most men are seized by a desire to get away from it all. Few of us are able to realize this urge and we allow fiction, movies, and reports from the fortunate who have been able to break away to satisfy adventurous inclinations. How can it be otherwise? One cannot just lock up, discard one's family, forget about the office and take off. The average male is a pretty dependable fellow and will keep his nose to the grindstone in order to retain family, home and income in happy harmony. Nevertheless, in most of us lies that urge, dormant perhaps; yet it may suddenly come to the surface if sufficiently stimulated, especially if the lure happens to have a South Seas setting. I know men who get that faraway look in their eyes by merely glancing at a picture of a coconut tree. Others need a little deeper prodding to release the imprisoned, secretly cherished desire which I call "South Sea Island Complex."

I had a bad case of this complex which kept bobbing up with alarming and increasing frequency. Then, suddenly, from the dreaming stage I was plunged miraculously into actuality.

I shall try to convey my experiences and reactions to my less fortunate brothers, the armchair adventurers. May you see yourself as the leading character of this volume and enjoy my South Sea wanderings as I did. May you inhale the sweet fragrance of the frangipani, feel the caress of the trade winds and hear the rumble of the surf on the reef as I bring to you the story of *Many Lagoons*.

The Author

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To the many inhabitants among the scattered islands and atolls of French Oceania who, with good-natured tolerance, accepted my inquisitive presence, to Dr. and Mrs. Howard Liljestrand and Rick Robinson of Honolulu for additional photography, and, last but with untold appreciation, to Captain Omer Darr, outstanding sailor of the South Seas, through whose kindness this book became possible—to all these wonderful people my sincere Tahitian message of gratitude . . . *E Maururu a Vau*, I thank you all.

Ralph Varady

CHAPTER 1

Somewhere in the Pacific, below the equator, a good southeast trade wind is coaxing a schooner toward her destination. Her course is toward an island, and this island is the goal of a happy dreamer—a dreamer too far gone for any alarm clock to bring him back to reality. But let me tell you about it.

What would you do if you were offered a year's residence on a little island in the South Seas, with transportation there and back thrown in? *My* answer to such an unusual offer was an immediate yes, although it gave me only four days to break away from all existing bonds, social and otherwise. That this offer should have been tossed into my lap was unbelievable, though I had dreamed about such a chance for many years.

No sooner had I given my hastily spoken yes than my conscience began questioning the soundness of my mind: Would I be too civilized to wrest a living almost entirely from nature? How would I react to a multitude of deprivations—no electricity, no refrigeration, no gas, no cars, no essential comforts. Would I be affected by the sudden change in diet to which I would be subjected? How would it feel to be isolated among people of another race and color? Well, I would soon find out from actual experience.

Captain Darr of the schooner *Te Vega* of the Honolulu-Tahiti run had purchased, many years before, an eighteen-acre paradise on the island of Moorea, eleven miles from Tahiti. He had never lived on this property but planned some day to build a home there. It was he who suggested that I go down and see what could be done to improve the property, to get the rats out of the coconut trees, and to launch a full-scale war on land crabs; as well as to keep an eye on the production of copra, and to have some fun at the same time.

One day, early in January 1956, the schooner took me away from Honolulu. During the four days of preparation I purchased some of the things I would need: a year's supply of razor blades, mosquito netting, and so on. I also managed to trade my car for a dinghy with an outboard motor. I had barely enough time to write a form letter to my friends, notifying them of this sudden deviation from the normal.

> Dear Friend: I am resorting, in a great hurry, to a form letter in order to let you and many others know of my latest enterprise. The lure of the South Pacific islands has once more found me a willing victim. I am leaving Honolulu for an undetermined period. This time I'm settling on a small island in French Oceania, Moorea.

> Although this will not be a one-hundred-per-cent Robinson Crusoe undertaking, yet many of the familiar earmarks of this great tale will be there.
>
> Captain Darr's paradise was once the retreat of a wealthy Dane; today it resembles the Fall of the House of Usher. Small buildings and a large broken concrete foundation of the former magnificent mansion are all that remain of this one man's Eden; also, of course, the natural beauty which cannot be taken away and which time only seems to enhance. Has it not been said, ". . . the coral spreads, the palm trees grow, and only man departs."?
>
> Situated on the water's edge and surrounded by coconut palms, bananas, coffee, breadfruit, limes, avocados, papayas and mangos, a fabulous skyline which stirred the descriptive pen of Captain Cook, this peaceful place is to be my future home. No electricity, no gas, no modern conveniences; only plenty of fresh and salt water, fishing, swimming, hiking and loafing; an old dirt road around the island; eleven miles from Tahiti and Papeete, which can be reached by copra schooner once a week, where I can get supplies; such will be my pattern of life shortly after you read this.
>
> I feel that I am doing something that many of us would like to do but, due to obligations, never get around to doing. The mail plane arrives in Papeete only once every two weeks. Correspondence will take time, but I'll have plenty of that. Maybe my replies to your letters will convey to you the idyllic news that somewhere on this earth, unhampered by TV, press, supermarkets and jet planes, there is a paradise left. Anyhow, farewell until then.

I was now on my way to meet that dangerous challenge: realizing a dream.

There is plenty of time to think on board a sailing vessel crossing one of the loneliest stretches of the Pacific. It is an opportunity to find out what one really believes. In the rush of city living, one loses the direct plumb line between heart and logic. What one truly stands for gets lost in the necessities of daily living, there is no time to allow one s self to think of ideals or the possibilities for their fulfillment. Here on board ship no telephone line, no mechanized rumbling keeps the mind from delving into the pure esthetic of nature or hinders it from prying into the ultimate question: From where did I come, and where do I go?

My mind had already become geared to the slackened pace and, as we approached my future home, I felt in accord with my surroundings. I meant to see Polynesia not from the cocktail lounges of Papeete's hotels, to judge it not from the highly biased information supplied by third parties but from my own observation and association with its hereditary occupants, the Polynesians themselves. I would eat, play and work with the natives and try to acquire a knowledge of their language and their habits. I would observe their ways of fishing and their family life when possible. I would visit atolls as well as the high islands and know the thrill of riding whaleboats up and down remote lagoons. I would see nature so beautiful that no one man could ever enjoy it all in one lifetime.

I was going to Polynesia to find out just how right or wrong an

otherwise normal individual can be in putting certain of his convictions to the test. An incident some years ago became the mainspring for my own "new thinking," as I refer to it. Up to my thirty-eighth year, I had never been to a funeral. Then in one single year I had to attend three funerals of well-to-do friends. It made a deep impression on me. Upon leaving the third interment, I started to think about life and about the standard of values each sets for himself.

These three departed friends had all been successful in life . . . very successful. Yet they had died relatively young; all in their early fifties. Actually, they had worked themselves from the desk into the grave. I decided there and then that I would follow my inclinations, providing they were acceptable to society and would make me happy. Primarily, I decided to break away from the things which tie a man down and prevent him from doing that which he has secretly desired, perhaps since boyhood. And so I boarded this schooner on my way to the South Seas in search of happiness and peace of mind.

One afternoon in late January the skipper, seated on a lofty spreader, piloted the vessel through the pass in the reef which encircles the island of Moorea. Ahead rose the cathedral spires of an impressive mountain. On each side of the bay, complementary minor peaks and rugged hills drew my eye from this dominating peak down to the edge of the lagoon. I was struck immediately by the subtle way nature has blended the contrasts from the ocean level to the top of Mount Opunohu. Deep valleys, shallow valleys, tinted in every imaginable shade of green, greeted my eye from a great distance, while directly in front of the ship this gigantic horseshoe-shaped Papetoai Bay welcomed us to safe anchorage. In my immediate vicinity the sun transformed the water into a veritable kaleidoscope of aquatic colors. Behind the imperative white line of breakers the sheltered water shoals unevenly, causing a variation of hues merging from emerald green to striking versions of blue. Even the few native huts seemed to have been scattered in such a way that all blended into perfect harmony. As I took in this tantalizing scene, my conscience scolded me for having failed to learn the techniques of water-color painting.

Halfway in Papetoai Bay, on the left side, is the property I was to live on. The skipper's estate consisted of a small white sandy beach, two dingy little shacks, some rubble, and great quantities of coconut trees with a hill rising steeply behind this peaceful waterfront. The vessel was able to put in quite close to the beach and tie up sternwise to the nearest coconut trees.

I certainly felt like a lonely homesteader coming to his island. I stood surrounded by my belongings just above the high-water mark on the beach. There were tools, two bags of cement, boxes with clothing

and blankets, my dinghy and an outboard, a bicycle, books, a can of kerosene and a can of gasoline. The skipper had thoughtfully provided me with about ten dollars' worth of canned groceries and a loaf or two of bread.

There were final handshakes and quips about how to get along with the native girls. Then came the final moment when the fines were cast off, and with three blasts on her siren the schooner was on her way. This loud farewell broke the silence of the bay, and the great quiet which ensued left me with that sensation which most children experience when they are for the first time left at the kindergarten door by their mothers. The schooner, which had always looked good to me, now looked better than ever and assumed the role of a departing friend as she majestically made her way out of the pass once more. Six weeks would go by before she would poke into this bay again to find out how I was doing. I sat on a rock and watched her rise to the first swells outside the pass; then she made a turn to starboard and within minutes disappeared from the bay, leaving me to gaze at the endless expanse of the Pacific.

CHAPTER 2

Normally this would have been a good time for meditation, but it was about five in the afternoon and there would be only one more hour of daylight.

On this property had stood a beautiful limestone mansion. It had been a hideaway from the outside world for her previous owner. Since his death fourteen years ago and Captain Darr's purchase, the house had been empty and neglected. It had started to crumble and was finally demolished, the rubble still forming an irregular low wall along the water's edge. An immense piece of cement floor remained, about the size of a tennis court, cracked here and there but good and usable in other spots. A small separate house with a corrugated roof had withstood the weather. At one time this had been the kitchen, but the only traces remaining were a sink and slab, a few shelves, and a screened food locker, the legs of which rested in empty rusted cans, at one time filled with water to prevent the ants from getting to the food. A hole in the roof where at one time a stovepipe had emerged was patched with a flattened kerosene can. The entire structure was about ten by twelve feet and had a concrete floor. This was to be my home until I could erect something more suitable. I had the owner's permission to build anything I liked, providing I stuck to Polynesian architecture and used materials of the land.

An approaching rainstorm stirred me to action, out of my alone-at-last reverie. I spent the greater part of the remaining daylight removing my belongings from the beach to the little house. I placed the bed squarely in the middle of the floor as a precaution against spiders, centipedes and scorpions that might be climbing the walls during the night. Then I filled the remaining space with my belongings. As these occupied the entire floor, there was no use even thinking of a fire for coffee that night. Outside everything was getting wet, and there was no dry wood in sight. I drank a can of fruit juice and ate some bread and a can of corned beef. It was now getting dark, and with the help of two flashlights I rigged up the mosquito netting I had found in a surplus store in Honolulu. Luckily it fit perfectly; at least I would not have to worry about mosquitoes while in bed that night.

Then I went outside and washed under a faucet before retiring. The French government had thoughtfully installed a waterline around the entire island, this being more sanitary than the old-fashioned native-type cisterns and waterholes. The latter were conducive to the breeding of mosquitoes and were, from a sanitary point of view, quite

condemnable because of the danger of contamination from human excrement.

By six-thirty it was dark as a night can be, and I retired. From the water's edge the house, bushes and everything in sight became one with the hill behind the house as darkness engulfed Papetoai Bay. I tossed around for a few hours, assuring myself that the dull thuds I heard were not bodies falling but merely coconuts dropping off the trees; that the swishing sounds on the roof were only the branches of a hibiscus tree being brought into contact with the roof by the increasing wind. The distant rumble, if heard in any city at night, would have been taken for the roar of downtown traffic, but I knew that it was the surf crashing on the reef. It is a pleasant sensation under these circumstances to find oneself on this side of the reef. Even in this modest little shack I felt the security of a man who is sheltered from the tempest without, the warmth of being protected even in solitude. I did not envy the schooner with her gleaming white bathtubs, her plush red-carpeted lounge and the coziness of human company, tossing somewhere outside and no doubt well reefed by now.

Eventually I fell asleep, only to be awakened by the persistent sound of a drum monotonously banging away. I switched on my flashlight and got out of bed. A leaky spot in the roof was allowing a steady patter of raindrops to fall on an empty five-gallon can. I substituted a bucket for the can and went to sleep once more. At about one in the morning I woke up again. This time I was stunned by the intense silence. I looked up and had the illusion of having gone to bed one night and awakened the next night, the difference was so great. A moon was shining, bright enough to reveal the other side of the bay. The water had not a ripple on its surface, and the roar on the reef had diminished to a faint murmur, just enough to remind me that it was still there.

I got up and went outside. I made my way to the little beach and sat on a rock. It made no difference which way I looked: all I could see was boundless beauty. The palm fronds were lined with a gloss of pure silver as they caught the moon's rays. The water, from the shallow little wave at my feet to as far as the eye could reach out over the Pacific, reflected the moon as truly as any mirror would have done. For no reason I could think of, this nocturnal panorama somehow reminded me of Holy Night on a snowclad mountain slope, the world in perfect peace and Man grateful to his Maker for having surrounded him with such ample proof that the simplest things in life are the most beautiful.

In the middle of the bay I could clearly discern the out-lines of a native fisherman in his outrigger canoe, slowly paddling and singing a

plaintive but catching melody. The simple aria floated over the water's surface and, in covering the distance from its originator to my receptive ears, any coarseness in the voice of the singer was lost and the sound made mellow.

Polynesia had indeed made up for the lack of organized welcome committees and alohas and leis to this lone arrival upon her shores. I went to bed, confident that I had not done the wrong thing in coming to Papetoai.

I woke up at six the next morning and took my bath in the bay. After that I made a small fireplace with rocks, hobo style and with some charcoal and kerosene I managed to get my coffee percolator going. My first breakfast consisted of coffee, canned butter, bread and marmalade. I stuck pretty close to this menu for breakfast during my entire stay in Moorea and never missed such items as hot cakes, ham and eggs or breakfast sausages.

By nine o'clock the sun had crept over the hill behind the house, and with its warmth there disappeared any feeling of desolation and lonesomeness I had hitherto felt. Roosters crowed across the bay, the surf resumed its normal roar, and the mynah birds were chattering in the bushes and coconut trees. In the distance a few canoes were among the shoals within the reef.

I found myself looking at the reef a hundred times a day. It became a habit similar to the way one looks at his watch or a neighborhood clock when going to work in the morning. On a nice day it is like a fine, white line of demarcation between the contrasting blues of sea and sky; on an uneasy day it is a row of growling teeth between a gray windswept sky and the dark, turbulent water. On a moonlit night it reminds one of a silver thread lying upon a darkened jewel. No matter when you look up, it is always there. It is an important piece of topography, for all who come to the island must come through the pass in the reef. It is actually an escape hatch to the domain of rest and peace. The pass stirs the imagination and seems to grant a man immunity from the worries and cares of the outside world. There is magic in the way the constant movement and mountains of upshooting spume can hold one's attention for lengthy periods of time, very much in the same way that looking into slow flames in a fireplace at home can engross one in thought.

CHAPTER 3

I got on my bicycle and pedaled along the old dirt road around the head of the bay toward the village of Papetoai which is on the right-hand side as one enters the bay. The natives call it Faatoai and pronounce it Fah-ah-toe-eye, clipping short each of the four syllables.

The village is no more than a cluster of native houses spread on each side of the road. Here and there is a frame house, and the old mission church is of concrete. In the middle of this settlement, built of wood, is a school. A football field is equally divided by the road, and, when traffic appears, either the drivers get interested in the game and stay right there watching or, if the blowing of the horn becomes urgent, the game is stopped for a few seconds.

There is a small, single-storied hotel with an old sign announcing its status. Pigs, fowl and a Utter of dogs, all in the greatest harmony at the front door, would have impeded any sudden arrival. But, as I later found out, nothing in Papetoai is sudden. No one goes anywhere, and the few who arrive on the old *Mitiaro* or the *Moanatae* from Papeete are usually pretty much worn out from the tossing for which they paid ninety-six cents.

I made my way leisurely through the village and was aware that my presence on the island was already known. “A Marite (Mah-ree-tay, an American) has been left behind from the ship that entered the bay yesterday.” This flash of information and any other local news is carried around the island at an amazing tempo by what is known locally as the coconut radio. It is carried across lagoons by fishermen or on the road by anyone traveling by. It is eventually carried to the other islands by schooners whose talkative crews assume the role of newscasters, adding their own comments and slants as they go along. It is amazing how a simple phrase can end up on some distant *motu*, distorted and lengthened. There are no newspapers, and Radio Tahiti has only a short evening broadcast which is not listened to by the majority of the natives because they do not possess radios; besides, they will hear the news just as fast on the coconut radio. Everyone is talked about in some vein or other, and no one minds it. It is when there is no gossip about you that people become suspicious and look at you with raised eyebrows.

From doors and windows people smiled at me or waved their hands and greeted me in the traditional Tahitian *“la orana”* I stopped at the Chinese store. It was a small, rough-boarded house, painted in a glaring blue, and it carried an outsize sign above the front door:

ETABLISSEMENTS LAI SANG
#4553 Commerçant et Boulanger

or

The Establishment of Lai Sang, tradesman and baker.

Upon entering I was greeted by a friendly young Chinese who spoke excellent French, fair English and probably a fluent Cantonese or Tahitian had I so desired. He also had already learned of my presence on the island. Out of one of the very few kerosene refrigerators on Moorea, Lai Sang produced a bottle of lemonade and offered it to me. Then, after the usual preliminaries, he got down to business. It was most fortunate, he said, that my location was just at the end of his daily bread route. He has a Tahitian boy on horseback who goes around the bay once a day with a large sack on his back, delivering bread to customers. It was arranged that one loaf of French bread would be delivered at my house every day. I was to put up an empty box or an empty kerosene can on the coconut tree nearest to the house, and the bread would be left in it. Lai Sang then displayed his limited supply of canned goods to me. All I had to do was to give a note to the bread boy, and anything I needed would be delivered the next day.

As I took in the contents of the little store, I wondered how Lai Sang would react were he suddenly placed in one of our supermarkets, with row after row of frozen goods and attractively displayed merchandise by the acre. Not knowing any better, he flourished his hand proudly toward a shelf on which stood seven cans of a popular American brand of pork and beans. He informed me that this was a good seller on the island.

Then Lai Sang said, "You have a woman with you?" I replied in the negative and perceived immediately a trace of disappointment in his reaction.

"Oh," he said, "that is bad. Your place is very lonesome. You must find a woman in the village to come and live with you. It is not good to live alone."

I brushed aside his remarks with a smile and reasoned that Lai Sang's nimble mind had already figured out that it would be better for his business to feed two mouths instead of one, that his interest went further than merely to ensure my romantic stability.

Next I inquired about native labor to help me weave a palm frond roof. Again Lai Sang had the answer at the tip of his tongue. He informed me that the son of the village constable, the gendarme who was also postman, was the best roof weaver in Moorea but, as he was fishing at this moment, he could not come over to my place until the next day. I quietly surmised that Lai Sang's knowledge of the roof

weaver's whereabouts was yet another proof of the efficiency and expediency of the coconut radio.

Most stores on the islands of French Oceania are kept by the Chinese. The Tahitians are not a race to enjoy being tied down to a daily routine. They live their lives in a to-day-is-today-and-we'll-see-what-happens-tomorrow attitude. Bills, invoices, credit, debit, inventories and such are too much worry and care for the average native. So the Chinese have the commerce in their hands, and one must give them credit, for they are hard workers; there is no limit to the hours they put in to make a few francs' profit out of the poor natives. Chinese stores follow a universal pattern throughout the islands of Polynesia. They contain anything— canned corned beef, underwear, pareu material, bush knives, needles and thread, lemonade, Texas onions, fishhooks, Algerian potatoes, Cuban sugar and kerosene lanterns. The only thing you will not see in a Chinese store is alcohol, for only a Tahitian or a Frenchman can obtain a liquor retail license.

I can see why the Tahitians refuse to be tied down to storekeeping. They are a carefree people, a people who have had no war for more than a century. There are no famines, no floods, no excessively cold temperatures or major diseases. No nervous disorders or stomach troubles from high-pressure living threaten them. Lagoons with an abundance of fish and land with fruit in large quantities supply most of their nourishment. Copra production is year round and requires little work. Certainly a combination of such desirable factors must leave a happy mark on these people. Even filariasis is on its last legs.

In no time at all I learned the facts about copra. The process of preparing it is simple. You wait until the nuts drop from the coconut trees (you climb a tree only if you want a drinking nut). Take four nuts which have dropped on the ground, crack them in halves with an ax, and leave them there for two days. After that the white meat can easily be removed with a bent knife. The meat is dried in the sun for about twelve days. One has to be careful, for neither rain nor the dew of the night should touch it; therefore it must constantly be protected from rain showers and must be covered up at night. It has to be turned once daily with a pitchfork so that it dries evenly. By drying, I mean that all the nonfat moisture must be allowed to evaporate. Once this has been done, the product of your four nuts is called copra and is ready for the market. There should be about two pounds of dry copra, about one kilogram. You take this to the Chinese store and collect fourteen cents for it. The Chinaman keeps this copra and that which he collects from many others until he has a sufficient quantity to warrant sending for a schooner to pick it up and transport it to

Papeete. He makes exactly one franc profit for every kilogram that passes through his hands (in American money, one and six tenths of a cent), but he also makes a profit on merchandise the natives generally take home as part payment for their copra. From Papeete, the copra is shipped by freighter to France, where most of it is used in the margarine industry. Very little goes to the soap industry these days, mainly because of the development of artificial detergents.

I have used the quantity of four nuts to illustrate the step-by-step process. Actually, one rarely trades in copra in less than one-hundred-pound sacks. An average yield from one hundred coconut trees should be one ton per year. One single tree can be productive for as long as forty years or more. Copra is one of the Big Three in French Oceania, the other two being vanilla and mother-of-pearl.

For copra white men, dark men, honest men and ruthless bounders have spent lifetimes on countless atolls harvesting the fetid-smelling product. They have battled the harmless but ever-present myriads of copra bugs and saturated their lungs with the musty odor of decaying coconut meat. Many ships have made fortunes, while the bones of others are still bleaching on treacherous reefs.

CHAPTER 4

Weeds had grown high through every crack in the broken cement floor around the little house. I would have to rip up the worst part of this old flooring and thoroughly clean the parts that remained intact if I wanted some semblance of order on the property.

Across from the kitchen stood another old shack; evidently at one time it had been a storeroom or warehouse. It measured about ten by twenty-two feet and had a cement floor which was almost intact. There was so much dirt and brush, however, that I could not readily tell that it actually was a cement floor. A waist-high concrete wall, made of ground coral, was the only solid part left, and out of this stuck what had at one time been the frame for a roof. Traces of pandanus thatching still remained, although it was completely eaten by small insects. A large hibiscus plant was growing through the rear end of the hut, and the side walls were cracked badly. The entire structure was about twenty feet away from the kitchen and in line with it. I could already visualize this old shack repaired—a new palm-frond roof, the cement floor cleared of dirt, and the cracks filled with cement.

The inside of the walls could be whitewashed and, with some interior decoration South Sea style, it would make a fair bed-sitting room. Furthermore, by putting a roof over the open space between the two shacks, a pleasant patio could be formed. I could lay a crazy pavement type of flooring in this space by removing some of the broken cement slabs from outside and fitting them together jigsaw-puzzle style. Then I could fill up the cracks with new cement. This would make agreeable open-air yet shaded living quarters.

As I was pondering the various possibilities, I was surprised by a persistent noise, "Pst . . . pst . .

I looked behind me, and there stood two tiny Tahitian girls, almost in the nude. One had a quantity of avocados in a basket which she was almost dragging along the ground. The other carried three breadfruit. I smiled as they approached offering me their loads. Fortunately I knew the Tahitian word for thank you, and they giggled as I said, *"Maururu"* Then their bashfulness overcame them, and they darted down the road with loud shrieks of laughter and much chatter. Every now and then I could make out the word, *"Popaa"* No doubt they were talking about me, as this word is the native appellation for a white man, used in the same sense as the word *"Haole"* in Hawaii.

I later found out that these little girls were the daughters of my nearest neighbor, Emil, who lived about a mile down the road. The

avocados were immense, and so were the breadfruit.

I spent the rest of the day unpacking several things and getting them in place. Then I gathered some dry firewood and stored this for future use. Mentally, I was still adjusting myself to this great change, for it was hard to believe that only yesterday I had been on a magnificent yacht, a millionaire's plaything, and today I was on a friendly little island left almost to my own resources.

That afternoon I hitched the outboard motor on to the dinghy and decided to take a spin around the bay as close to the shore as the coral shelf would allow. The native fishermen I encountered in their outriggers were most polite, and all greeted me with that friendly hail, *"Ia orana."* No one in the least minded the noisy motor around their fishing, and several tried to engage in conversation, an effort which failed, due to our lack of knowledge of each other's languages.

The shoreline of the bay was just as captivating as one could imagine. Here and there were copra sheds, and native houses frequently were placed within yards of the water's edge. I gathered later that this was done with an eye on the mosquitoes, which are not so numerous at the water's edge as deeper inland.

At the right-hand side of the entrance to the bay lay the rusted remains of a French man-of-war which had run on the reef in 1917. The previous day I had seen her guns lying by the side of the church in the village. They have been there for forty years now, with more scrap salvaged at the same time. I found out that whenever a native needs a piece of heavy metal, whether for an anchor or an anvil, he goes to this naval scrap heap and picks out what he wants. In the shallower parts, along the water's edge, I could see fish of every color and description—fascinating stripes, deep reds, dots, all kinds of blue, every variation of green, spotted ones, long ones, short ones, thin and fat; an endless collection of underwater life. I knew then why no one in Polynesia is ever hungry.

I returned to my beach just as the sun was setting. So many descriptions of tropical sunsets in the South Seas have been attempted that I feel completely inadequate to add my version. I can say that its indescribable beauty is hypnotic, and night after night you find yourself watching it, for tomorrow it will not be the same as today, and today it will be different than yesterday.

CHAPTER 5

I woke up the next morning in time to see a canoe making its way toward my beach. A native youth jumped out of the craft when it touched the sand and, after dragging the canoe up the beach a few feet, he came toward me. He carried a bush knife in one hand and wore a pair of shorts evidently cut out of an old pair of blue jeans. From the waist up he was bare, and a large pandanus hat covered his head. His French was mediocre, but he managed to convey to me that he was Siki, the roof weaver sent by Lai Sang. I took him to the old shack and, with drawings and sketches on paper, I made him understand just what I had in mind. My architectural ability evidently met with his approval, for he announced that he was ready to start work right away. He also told me that his pay would be one hundred francs per day (one dollar and sixty cents for eight hours' work).

After our verbal agreements on design and labor, Siki disappeared into the bushes on the hill behind the house. I was laughing to myself at the easy and effortless way by which a house can be built here: no architects, plumbers, electricians, interior decorators, cement mixers and bricklayers, or union regulations. Just let your imagination run wild and do exactly as you please.

Siki reappeared with a bundle of long, thin, straight tree trunks. They were about the size of a silver dollar in diameter and of very firm wood: acacia. He had felled about twenty of these and tied them together in one bundle with the bark of another tree. Next, he gathered a heap of coconut husks and lit a fire. Then he took each trunk and, with a slow, twisting motion of the hand, ran the entire trunk through the low flames. The scorched bark was then easily removed, and a clean, solid, white, very rigid pole resulted. Siki took about an hour and a half off for lunch, which included a sound nap in the shade of a tree. He continued his foraging until five; then, with a flourish of his hat and *"Ia orana"* he was off in his canoe. The next day he showed up with his wife.

Ari, for that was her name, was a typical island girl, with a giggle at every sentence; large, flat feet, and the inevitable flower in her hair. She was not beautiful by our standards but had a very pleasant, quiet way and was able to converse in French much better than her husband could. She asked me my name and promptly translated it into "Rafi." This name stuck to me as long as I was in Oceania.

Siki had brought with him a very long bamboo pole with a knife secured to the thin end. While Ari and I were exchanging information about ourselves, Siki went from palm tree to palm tree. With one deft

slash he would lop off a choice branch and quickly dodge it as it came hurtling earthward. When he had about eighty of these, he gathered them all in one pile, and with his bush knife he split each frond in half: one firm slash down the middle of the branch. After that he trimmed down each half with his knife. He used his knife more or less as a carpenter would use a plane.

Now Ari came into action. Choosing a shaded spot, she proceeded to weave the blades of each frond into a pattern, so that the finished frond became a closely woven patch about seven feet long by three feet wide. Ari, like her husband, took the noonday nap but nevertheless ended the day with fifty-eight woven fronds ready to be attached to the roof.

Meanwhile Siki, with my aid, had built a new top framework on the old shack out of the acacia poles. He also made a few more trips to the bushes and emerged with some local wood called *burau*: a nice, soft wood, perfectly white and very easily trimmed. We used this to replace various sections of completely rotted two-by-four beams. Between helping Siki and watching the roof-building operation, I also managed to remove a lot of weeds and earth which had hidden the cement floor. I hosed out the interior of the little shack, thus preparing it for cement patching and painting.

The following day Siki once more cut a big pile of fronds. He did this to keep his wife weaving ahead of him. Next, with thin, wet strips of bark from the burau, he proceeded to attach the previous day's woven fronds to framework on the roof. This was the third day, and by the end of the fourth day the entire roof was in place, snug and watertight. It would last at least three years, and by that time the weather and the insects would be sure to have eaten their way through it and a new one would be required. The woven roof was a beautiful green, but later it dried to a neutral brown. For a really good job, the fronds, after being woven, should be soaked in salt water for thirty-six hours. This protects them from damage by animals.

On the fifth day, Siki started the installation of a roof to link the two houses. I was sitting next to Ari and watching her weave. She could look at you and carry on a conversation and never once glance at what her hands were doing. Yet frond after frond came from her lap ready for the roof. She must have felt that she knew me well enough by now to ask me the question at the back of her mind. It came out bluntly, in the middle of a discussion about fish.

"When the house is finished, Rafi, you have a woman coming to live with you?"

Once more I replied in the negative.

"Oh, that is not good; you must have a woman to live with you. Go to the village and find a vahine to live with you. There are plenty.

I know at least three who would like to stay with you. A man like you should not be living alone. You are not yet a *papa ruau*, and I don't think you are a *mahu*!"

I politely thanked Ari for her concern and managed temporarily to put the matter in the background by announcing that I had lunch ready for all three of us.

Gradually the entire project of roof building came to an end, and I was ready for interior decorating. I was fascinated, like a child with a new toy, when it came to laying down the flagstone paving between the two houses. Never before having worked with cement, I found it interesting and made a different batch of cement each day as the work progressed. I will admit that I would probably be classified as an adherent to the "weeping seams" school of masonry. However, my paving held very well, and I could not resist leaving my mark on Moorea by scratching my initials and the date on a section of the paving.

Next, I made a few authentic beachcombing jaunts up and down the bay and on the shoals inside the reef. I returned with all the requirements for that authentic South Sea touch so keenly sought after by tavern keepers in civilized countries: clam shells, spider shells, interesting chunks of driftwood, old fish netting, discarded bamboo bait traps, beautiful pieces of coral and some discarded flags and pennants from the schooner. All these and many more items found their way into the patio and the hut. Philodendron soon grew out of coconut shells, and frangipani was planted in bamboo sections. As a result of a little imagination, placed with taste these helped to make attractive living quarters out of what had been a rat-infested ruin.

And then the view: the ever-dominant peak of Opunohu at the head of the bay; those magnificent green hills across the bay; and to the north the always-present reef, the pass, and the great Pacific. In my immediate surroundings were shady coconut palms, the white-sand beach, and a serene tranquility one cannot put into words . . . That was my home in the South Seas.

I had taken stock of what grew on my domain in the way of fruit and flowers. There were plumaria, poinsettia and hibiscus of several colors. There were two gigantic avocado trees, the largest I have ever seen, with fruit weighing close to two pounds each. Furthermore, there was starfruit, breadfruit in great abundance, coffee, bananas, countless mango trees, some papaya and seven hundred and fifty coconut trees. There was also some vanilla vine, but this was not productive as it had not been pollinated for years. The ocean, too, supplied its generous share of edibles. There were at least eighteen different kinds of usable fish, as well as clams, lobsters on the reef at night, and fresh-water shrimps in the river running down from the

hills at the head of the bay. Truly, could I have wished for anything more?

There were no snakes or reptiles or other similar pests. There were rats, an occasional scorpion and a few centipedes, but none of these could spoil the over-all picture of ideal living.

But I suppose that every paradise has its serpent, and mine was no exception. In this part of the world it is the dreaded *nohu*, or stonefish. This deadly fish grows to about one foot in size. He is broad and rests on the bottom of shallow water. Rocks and coral beds are his favorite hangouts, and he conceals himself masterfully; he is like a chameleon in the water and adapts to the color of his surroundings with astonishing perfection. Lying between submerged rocks for hours at a time, scarcely moving at all, he will lure small fish into his opened, protruding mouth, fooling them into believing that his mouth is just another hole in the coral. His special menace to human beings is in his dorsal spines which rise from his back about two inches high. To step on one of these is a calamity. Unless you can be given an antidote shot within a short time, it will not be certain for a month whether you will live or die; you will be in bed for days, weeks, with a swollen foot, extremely high temperatures, your whole body in great physical agony.

A visiting Honolulu ichthyologist, Dr. Jack Randall, whom I questioned on the subject of the nohu, told me that in the Gilbert Islands a Negro, having stepped on a nohu, pleaded with his helpers to kill him on the spot. He preferred instant death to the agony of a possible slow recovery or, on the other hand, painful death.

I had been warned about this danger before arriving in Moorea, and I never, never entered the water without wearing a pair of rubber shoes. During my stay on the island I did succeed in killing about eight of these stonefish. They are very easy to kill once spotted, for they hardly move at all. When you see one, you approach him from above and take a good aim with a spear or underwater gun at close quarters. The trick is to see him, for he is a master at camouflage.

Less dangerous and easily recognizable is the beautiful lion fish. This is a pretty, six-inch fish with delicate wings, usually pink or orange in color. His sting is quite venomous but not fatal as that of the nohu.

The bay and reef also have their share of eels. During a diving expedition with Dr. Randall, we managed to kill and land a seven-foot eel with a diameter the size of a man's knee. However, these are dangers one encounters in almost any ocean.

The nohu is still the prime danger here. His claim to fame in this bay is proven by the name given to the great mountain at the head of the bay, Opunohu, which, literally translated, means the belly of the

stonefish.

CHAPTER 6

Shortly after the completion of the house, a canoe landed on my beach, and three Tahitian girls from the village came ashore. They were strangers to me but used their kinship with Ari as a means of introduction. They were attractive, well behaved, and spoke good French. They chatted and looked at all the recent improvements. One of them eventually lit a fire and put some breadfruit in the embers, while another produced a bowl of prepared raw fish from the canoe. The third had brought a flat bowl of banana poi and coconut cream, all wrapped in a piece of cloth knotted at the ends so that it could be easily carried.

We sat down and had lunch together, and then they helped to clear up and wash the dishes. Shortly afterward one by one they disappeared behind a tree and rewound their pareus; when they reappeared the pareus were transformed into attractive bathing suits. They invited me to go swimming with them. All three were excellent swimmers and divers. The afternoon wore on pleasantly. When the other two were drying themselves behind the tree, Pepetua, who was evidently the spokesman for the trio, came and sat by me. She put her hand on my arm, looked at me, and said, “Rafi, you have no vahine living with you yet?”

“No, Pepetua, not yet.”

“Why not?”

“I haven’t had much time to give it thought. You see, I have been busy getting the house fixed up.”

"And now that the house is fixed up?”

"I have not decided yet, Pepetua.”

There was a pause, and I felt that the time the other two girls were taking to dry themselves had been planned to give Pepetua a chance to do some talking.

"Well, when will you decide, Rafi?”

"I don’t know.”

"You know, it is not good to live alone. The people in the village will start talking about you. Why don’t you take one of us three to stay here with you? We are all three unmarried. Roti has a charming little girl called Teroro, very *nehenehe* (pretty) and only three years old. Please, Rafi, that is why we came to visit you today. It is not every day that an unattached popaa comes to our island.”

"Pepetua, you must give me time to think this over. Where I come from, one does not rush into such an arrangement. Please let me get used to things first. I promise you I will let you know soon, but not

right now."

Just then, Roti and Tetua came from their concealment. The language of the eyes, which is highly developed among the Polynesians, immediately informed these two what had taken place. One has to witness this in order to believe it. I have seen all kinds of messages flash from eye to eye without the aid of the spoken word. Their muscular control of the areas surrounding the eyes is remarkable, and the slightest twitch has meaning.

The three girls departed, leaving me with mixed thoughts on this frequently recurring topic. It was clear that I would not be left in solitude long if this local interest in my welfare continued. Come to think of it, having a companion would be a good way to learn the Tahitian language!

Things may not be sudden in Papetoai, but they can be insistent. Coco, the bread boy, arrived at one o'clock the next afternoon. He usually stopped his horse, took a loaf of bread out of the sack, and dropped it into the box I had fixed to a tree trunk. Then with a sharp pull of the reins, he would be off to the next customer. He rode his horse bareback all the way around the bay. Then on his way home he would let the horse ramble along at leisure while he took a mouth organ out of his pocket and played merrily away.

Today Coco called me, and as I went up to him he handed me an envelope as well as the bread. Then he took off in a flash. I put the bread away in the kitchen and opened the envelope. Out fell two small photographs of a good-looking Tahitian girl. She looked to be about twenty-four years old and had long, black hair. She evidently had posed for amateur snapshots. I unfolded the accompanying note which was written in French.

Dear Monsieur:

Please, I would very much like to come to talk to you if you have no vahine with you yet. My father is in Papeete buying medicine for my mother who is sick, so I cannot leave her to come to you. Will you please not take any vahine in your house till you have spoken to me? I am very serious about this, and I hope to come to your house on my bicycle soon.

The photos are not so good as I am.

Ia Orana

And then there was a scribble which I could not decipher.

This unusual request took me so much by surprise that I had to sit

down and reread the whole thing. Here was an example of determination which I felt should at least be rewarded by an interview. Of all things, to send a note with the bread boy! I wondered if Lai Sang was at the back of it all.

I noticed that the old inter-island boat was coming through the pass and heading for Papetoai village. Later as I was sitting on the little breakwater by the beach, scanning the water with my binoculars, I noticed a canoe coming from the village in my direction. I paid no attention, as many canoes come into the bay in a certain direction and then change course and head for a different destination. But after a while I could see that the occupant of the canoe was in uniform. As the paddler approached I recognized the village gendarme in his khaki uniform and cap. The cap had a faded red band, and in the center was a double laurel leaf carved from mother-of-pearl. Centered between the leaves was a large letter **P** for police.

Now the canoe was heading straight for the beach, and I ran down to the water to greet the constable. The *motoi* (for that is his title in the Tahitian language) was a pleasant, jovial old fellow. When he grinned, he threw his head so far back that all one could see was an open mouth with a large, solitary tooth, which stood out like a telephone pole in the desert. This made his grin all the more contagious. Inwardly I thought, Now is the time for jello!

We shook hands and walked to the house. In the patio we pulled up two chairs, and the motoi then proceeded to open a large canvas sack he was carrying. Stenciled on the side of this weather-beaten old sack were the words, "*Posies frangaises.*" I presumed the motoi was visiting me in his capacity of mailman today. Imagine! That large sack contained only one letter addressed to me. The address was a classic. Coming all the way from Rochester, New York, it read:

Ralph Varady
Moorea
The South Seas

I marveled at the Sherlock Holmes quality of both the American and the French Postal services. I poured out a glass of red wine for my private mailman and questioned him.

"Motoi, this came across on the *Mitiaro* a short while ago?"

"Eh (yes), Rafi, it came on the *Mitiaro*."

"Tell me, why do you use that big sack to deliver one letter only?"

"It is regulation, Rafi; the Motoi Frani, you know" (French Police).

"Well, thank you for coming all this way just for me."

The old man brushed aside my remark with a sweep of his hand and, pointing to the empty glass which I hastily refilled, he

commented: "I have nothing else to do. What about the letter?"

"What about it?"

"Is it from your vahine in America? She is coming here soon?"

"No, Motoi, I have no vahine in America. It is only a note from a friend."

"You are a peculiar one, Rafi. No vahine in America and no vahine here."

The coconut radio did not have far to travel that time for, inasmuch as the motoi was Siki's father, everything that went on in my house while Ari was around would get to the old man soon enough.

He put down his glass and laughed. He made references to girls in the village, adding that Moorea had always been known for its attractive women.

Then, pointing to the reef, he said: "See those chunks of rust out there by the pass? They are there today because in the past a man thought much of one of our girls here in Faatoai. Let me tell you what happened.

"What you see out there is all that remains of the French cruiser *Kearsaint*. I was here when it happened in 1917. You see, this cruiser was on her way down the bay to pick up some cattle and transport them to Rapa for the Government Frani, and after that she was supposed to return to France to help fight the Boches. But this woman here in Faatoai—well—the commander of the cruiser was very much in love with her. He did not like the idea of going back to France, so there is the *Kearsaint* on the reef."

I failed to grasp the implication.

"What do you mean, there is the *Kearsaint* on the reef?"

"Well, you see, if the ship is put on the reef, then of course the ship and the commander cannot go back to France!"

I sat upright. Unbelievable that a man would deliberately put his ship on a reef in order to be close to his sweetheart! I credited this story to local folklore and questioned and cross-examined the motoi, but he stuck to his story. Then I ventured to ask what had become of the commander after the "accident."

"He got decorated, Rafi."

"Decorated! What for?"

"Eh, Rafi, decorated. You see, he did something good after that, and the government decorated him, just like that."

"But the ship, the loss of property, how about the inquiry?"

The motoi made a wry grimace and once more waved his hand as if this were a trivial matter.

"And the woman, what happened to her?"

"Oh, she was happy with him for a while. I forget what happened

then. Anyhow, she died only four years ago. But I was saying, Rafi: You see, some men did think a lot of our vahines in Moorea. This woman, she was the aunt of the girl who wrote you because she could not come to talk to you!"

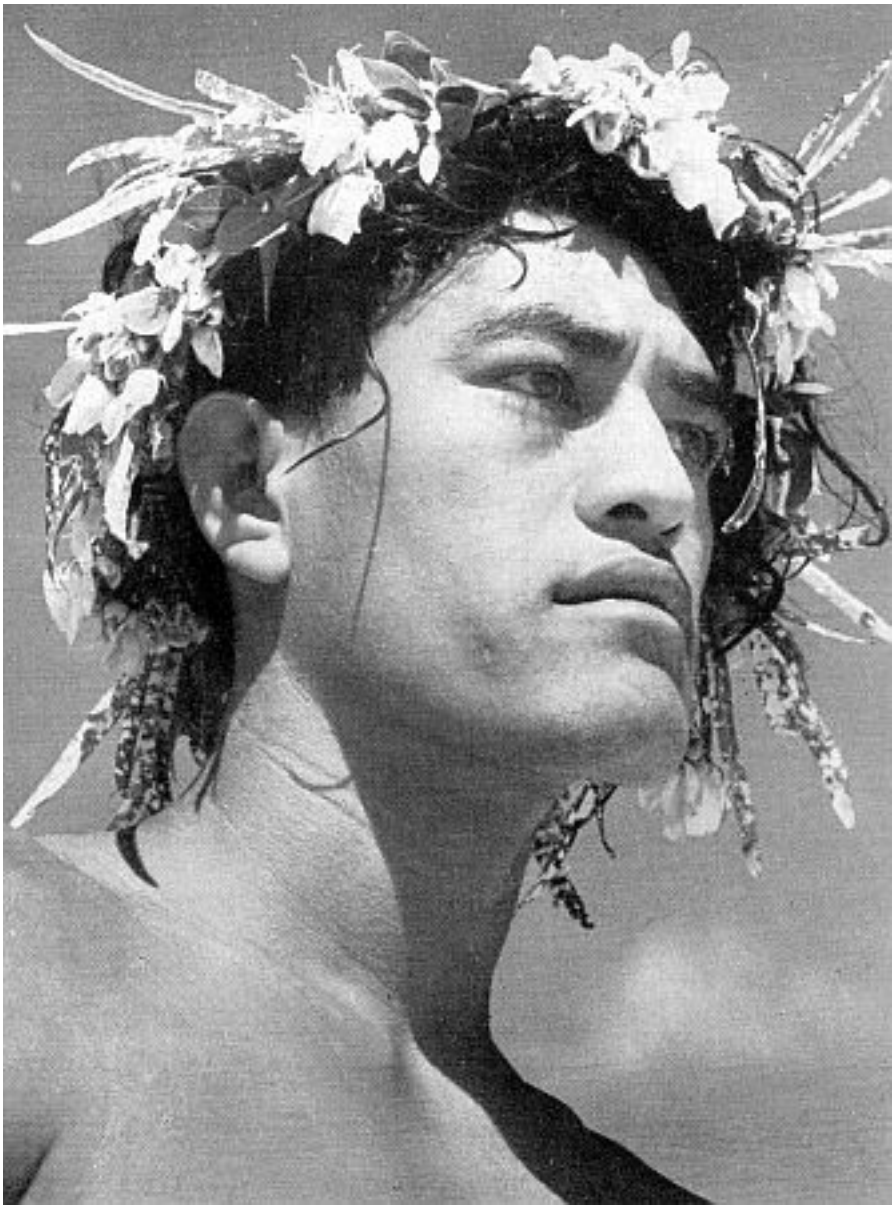
I was astounded at this superb sample of what the coconut radio can do. The old man got up, neatly folded his bag, and held out his hand.

As he got into his canoe, he remarked: "Just think, Rafi. A man loses a ship for a woman. You could lose five minutes, couldn't you, to talk to this girl who sent you the little note? She is a nice girl. *Ia orana, hare vau te fare*, I am going home."

The old man took his paddle and gave me a final smile before shoving off. I laughed, for all I could see was his one tooth surrounded by a big grin.

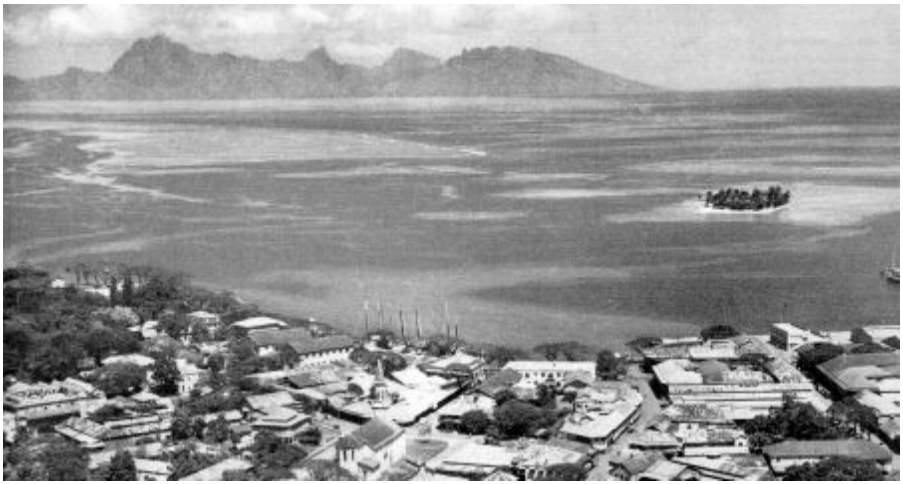
I returned to the patio and sat down to think this thing over. In a moment I picked up my binoculars and observed the remains of the *Kearsaint* with new interest.

PHOTO SECTION I



Emil, my neighbor in Papetoai

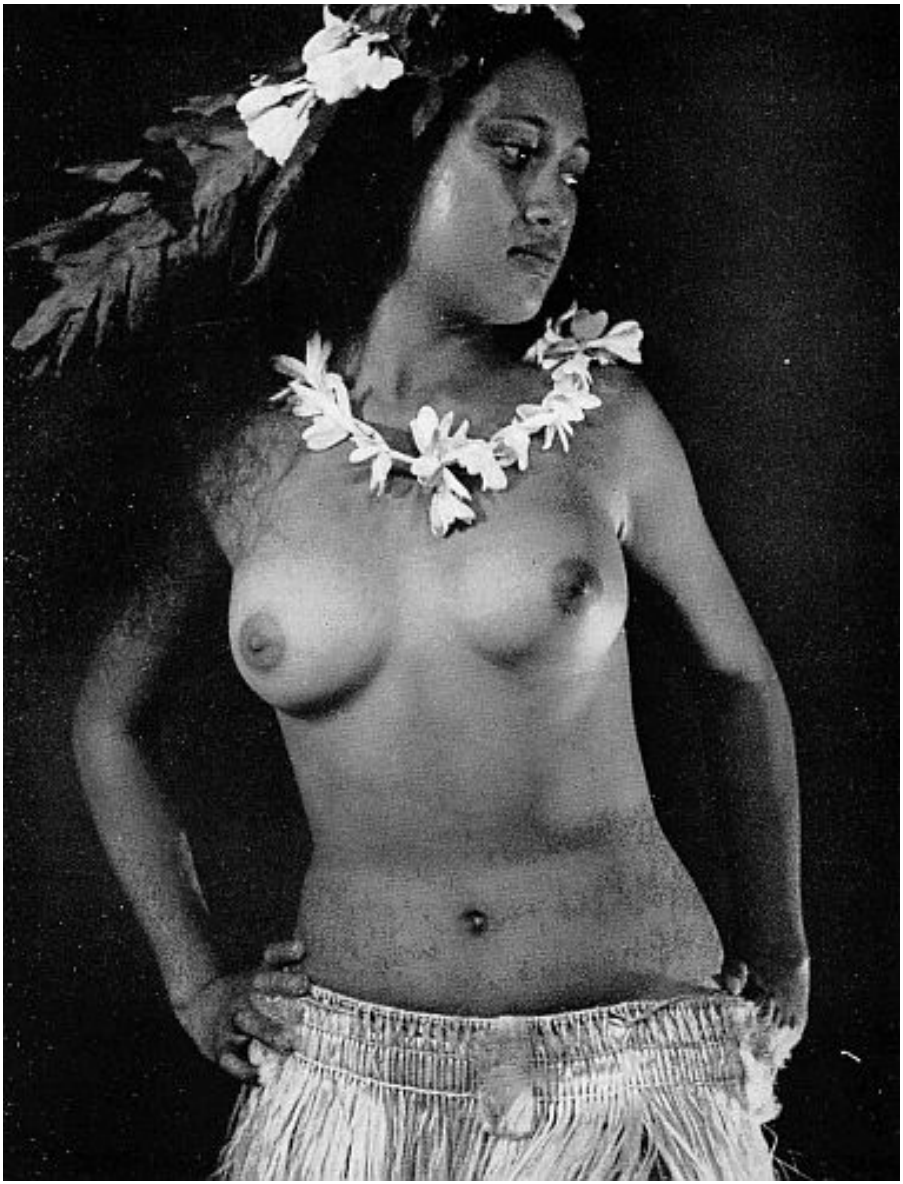
The *Te Vega* tied up at Papetoai Bay



Papeete and Moorea in the distance

Captain Darr's house rebuilt, exterior.

Captain Darr's house, interior.



A Polynesian dancer

A typical copra schooner

Waterfront, Papeete

Papeete Post Office

A few steps from Papeete

Norma, whose father was an American

CHAPTER 7

My neighbor, Emil, was a good-natured fellow. He arrived one day and offered to help me get rid of the old cracked cement. Together we dumped most of it into the bay, using buckets to get it from its original place to the water. The rubble, once the walls of the mansion, was also deposited in the water, and bit by bit the place looked occupied and cared for.

One day Emil showed up with a horse and a colt. He explained that the horse belonged to the pastor in the village. The pastor had very little good pasturage for his horse who was still suckling her three-week-old colt. So, after seeing the long grass on the once-beautiful lawn of my place, the two of them decided that the pastor and I could be helping each other. I would get my grass trimmed, and the mare and colt would be well fed in return. Every day we tied the mare to a different coconut tree with a long line, and systematically the entire lawn was brought into shape. The young colt just ambled alongside its mother.

Emil could remember very well the mansion which had stood here. He described it in great detail, sometimes pacing around the old cement floor, just to show how a certain room had been laid out. He showed me the foundation of the old bathroom, and together we were able to dig up some of the old waterline. The thing that had left the biggest impression on Emil, though, was the former owner's yacht: "Eh, Rafi, *pahi nehenehe rahi roa* . . . Yes, Ralph, a very beautiful ship." I asked Emil the name of the yacht. He promptly replied, *"Tamaru uouo"*

I was perplexed for a while until Emil explained that that was the translation of the British name on her stern. Further questioning and the help of a Tahitian dictionary revealed the true name had been "White Shadows." Now I knew why the islanders had remembered her so well, for she had been a magnificent craft. I also remembered the book, *White Shadows in the South Seas.*

Emil then rattled on and told me all about the American ship *Yankee* which always came to Papetoai Bay on her world cruises. I slowly became aware that this particular bay leaves a lasting impression on anyone who visits it. To my knowledge, it was Captain Cook who first paused and described Papetoai's great beauty while he was here on the *Endeavour*. Cook had left his mark on Moorea: the next bay from Papetoai, the only other one on the island, is called Cook's Bay. The natives, however, call it Pao Pao.

Many writers and travelers from that time on have described

Papetoai Bay, and I will merely quote one of the more recent comments, that by Captain and Mrs. Irving Johnson in *Westward Bound in the Schooner Yankee*.

> "A year later, with the Pacific all behind me, I decided that if I had to come out to the 'Islands' to live permanently, I would choose Moorea . . . before sunset that day, nearly everyone aboard the 'Yankee' was heard to remark that he was coming back here some day. The moonrise convinced the last few."

I found myself at the foot of this long list of admirers of Moorea.

You may think: Beautiful, yes, but what can one do all day? I rose at dawn, at the very latest six o'clock; for I turned in at six-thirty every night. There was no reading in bed. The little kerosene lantern was not intended as a reading light, so most of my reading I did during the day. I had been given two stacks of leading American magazines. Each stack was fully three feet high. During the day, when I felt like reading, I'd catch up on all kinds of articles about things that go on right under your nose but which one rarely digs into any further. I became an expert on the Kefauver investigations. I know all the details of the large plane and train crashes during the last two years. I even know who put the finger on Waxy Gordon.

It is a great feeling, in the early morning after your shower, to sit on an easy chair in the patio with a cup of coffee which you have grown yourself. You have picked, dried, husked, shelled, roasted, ground and brewed it. It has a different flavor from the standard American brands, and I learned to like it very much after a while. It is strong and very black.

While sipping my coffee, I looked out at the reef, and without the least hurry decided what I would do that day. Shall I go fishing in the neighborhood with the canoe? Or shall I go farther out toward the reef in the dinghy with the outboard? Shall I go for a walk to the entrance of the bay? Maybe I can take my bicycle and go over to the village and gossip with the motoi or Lai Sang. Perhaps I will answer some letters from curious friends in America, some of whom seem to pity me in my exile. I have had letters from people who actually, in their minds, have me on a narrow strip of sand, surrounded by water, with three lone palm trees: the regular cartoonist's South Sea island castaway.

Sometimes I spent a few hours at a time just thinking. With a sense of detachment and added perspective I delved back into my own past and wondered why I have always been so keen to do certain things in a certain way, when other ways were just as good. I found myself analyzing my own motives and those of my friends, and wondering how deeply rooted is the drive for money in us all. How

many men would be thinking of all the money they would not be making while on this island? How many of us in civilized countries are able to exist only because we give someone else money to feed us, to work for us and do things for us which we are unable to do ourselves. This may range from producing a dime for a cup of coffee at a counter to having furniture moved. Naturally I realize that in this day it is impossible to get completely away from the monetary system, but my stay down in the islands taught me how much satisfaction one can get from being able to some extent to detach oneself from it. Money loses some of the halo which it wears in our cities. For man in this part of the world, money is merely a means to obtain the things he himself cannot produce. But he does not let the desire for it run away with him. He is not interested in devoting his life to a large acquisition of wealth. His relaxed pace, his fishing, his siestas and his family are to him the important things in life.

And so my mind rambled on, assessing the values of one way of life against the other. In any case, it brought an awareness of self-accomplishment, and I knew the satisfaction of watching the reef in the evening as the sun went down and saying to myself:

“I have lived well today. I did what I wanted to do. I had no recourse to others for my needs. I took care of them myself and did not have to dig up a dime every time I desired something, nor did I have to hold out my other hand to take in money for services rendered. Yet I lived, I am very happy, and I look forward to tomorrow as another day like this one."

Most of the population of Moorea has no income of any kind—regular income, that is. The actual cash which they receive from time to time is the result of the sale of copra, vanilla or coffee. Generally when they receive money they do not hoard it but buy things which come in handy in everyday life, such as pots and pans, kerosene, simple hardware, tools and clothing. I had a good chance to observe Moorea family life and the financial structure thereof, thanks to my neighbor Emil.

Emil always has a little copra drying or ready to be taken to Lai Sang for sale or trade. That takes care of periodic cash, but it is not much when spread over a family of seven: himself, his wife, four children, and his old father who lives with the family. Furthermore, his wife was expecting another baby. The entire family lives in an old wooden structure, but that is only for sleeping. As in all Tahitian households, the kitchen, the shower and toilet are built separately. The house for sleeping, the kitchen and the bathroom are respectively called: *fare ta oto, fare tutu* and *fare pape*. With the exception of the sleeping quarters, all other buildings at Emil’s are of the palm-frond type. The land on which Emil’s home stands is his own and was his

father's before that.

He also has a bicycle, two canoes, four dogs, two cats, a few chickens and three pigs. On his ground grows the same variety of fruit as on mine. Emil will go at night with a lantern in his outrigger and catch fish for the next day's food. If the fish is abundant, he comes over to my house and presents me with whatever he will not need. If the fish do not bite, he'll go to the shoals on the inside of the reef where large quantities of pahua clams can be found at all times. Twenty or thirty of these are ample for his family.

For breakfast the family eats bread and coffee. The bread costs eight cents a loaf. Emil's other expense at the breakfast table is the unrefined brown sugar which Tahitians use in great quantities. At noon, the Tahitians eat for the whole day. There is baked breadfruit which is very delicious, raw fish on some days, cooked fish on others; if not fish, then clams or lobsters which are caught on the reef at night. If Emil does not feel like fishing, then he kills a chicken or two. Sometimes they splurge and open a can of corned beef, of which tons are shipped to French Oceania from New Zealand and Australia. Then there is banana, papaya or pineapple poi. The Tahitian poi is unlike the Hawaiian poi. It is made by taking a bowlful of bananas, pineapples or papayas and crushing this to a fine mush. Two parts of fruit to one part of taro flour or cornstarch and a stick of vanilla are put into a shallow tin and baked in an oven until brown on top. Coconut cream, the product of squeezed, grated coconut meat, is then added, and it is eaten warm. Believe me, it is very good. In the evening, the family once more returns to bread and coffee. I found myself sticking close to this diet and never felt the need for more. Meat is very scarce outside of Papeete.

I am inclined to believe that we all have a tendency to eat too much. It has become a habit or a fad, and we find ourselves eating just because it happens to be that time of day or because others are eating, rather than because we are hungry. While in Moorea I ate about one third the amount I had been eating before. Fresh meat, eggs, cakes, pies, potato, ham or bacon I never had. I never drank beer, since I don't enjoy warm beer and I had no refrigeration. But there is a good Algerian table wine obtainable and quite reasonable, thirty-seven cents a quart. It goes well with the fish diet. When I landed in Moorea, I had trouble getting into a size 36, but after a while I was able to use the size 34 trunks I had thoughtfully brought along. Moreover, I felt much better.

I should explain that raw fish is really not so bad as it sounds. The common method of preparing raw fish in French Oceania is as follows:

Filet the fish thoroughly and cut into dice-size pieces. Put these into a bowl and add the fresh juice of limes until covered. Leave this

for two hours and then draw off whatever lime juice has not soaked into the meat. Add a few slices of tomato, a few raw onion rings and maybe a dash of sliced bell pepper. Do not mash these into the marinated fish, but fold gently. To this, you add coconut cream, made of freshly grated coconut, of course. Now your raw fish is ready to be eaten.

You can also use the coconut cream in coffee, and many Tahitians flavor their coffee by dropping a piece of vanilla bean into the mixture as it is brewing.

My stove was an empty five-gallon kerosene can which I had rigged similar to a Japanese hibachi. The fuel was charcoal. Unless I had visitors this worked very well, but I had a stone fireplace on the cement floor for a larger production when necessary.

CHAPTER 8

Tourists would sometimes land on the other side of the island and would get some Chinese store owner to take them around the island in an old battered truck. Invariably, especially when there were Americans, they would stop to visit with me. While talking to these people, I felt that they sized me up in different ways. On the faces of some I could clearly see the pitying look which meant, "Poor fellow, he's gone completely native!" On the faces of others, especially the men, there was a delightful understanding.

My fellow countrymen, Medford Kellum and his wife, live on Papetoai Bay and have been here now for thirty-four years. Their house, presawed in Honolulu, had been brought down by a four-masted barque, the *Kaimiloa*. The Kellums' guest book was worthy of a few hours of study, for every individual of any importance who had ever been in French Oceania had signed it. The other former American inhabitant of Moorea was the well-known black-velvet painter, Edgar Leeteg. Unfortunately, he had been killed in a motorcycle accident in Papeete a few years ago. His residence was on Cook's Bay. Also on Cook's Bay lived two Swiss families, and I think there were three or four French families on Moorea. This completed the foreign legion of the island.

Nearly every yacht that tied up in Papeete sooner or later ventured across to Moorea, and very often it was my pleasure to be their host. Sometimes I even acted as "bay pilot." If a yacht anchored off my beach, I would let them have a water hose to fill their tanks. The large concrete slab in front of the house made an excellent laundry spot for their sails, blankets and even underwear. Pretty soon it got around the waterfront in Papeete that I was a soft touch for fresh water, and yachtsmen I'd never seen before would know my name before they landed. Dr. Jack Randall of Honolulu arrived one day on his yacht *Nani* and stayed in Papetoai Bay for a considerable time. He found this a unique place for tagging and studying fish.

Occasionally I'd go across to Papeete if I needed something which Lai Sang did not stock. The voyage from my house to Papeete was maritime transportation's greatest bargain. The *Moanatae* would come to my beach in the early morning, the skipper having the previous day been advised by Lai Sang of my wish to go to Papeete. Five more stops were made within the reef. Sometimes a flag waving canoe would add another passenger, and then the voyage across the eleven-mile gap to Papeete would start. All this for sixty francs, or ninety-six cents U.S.A.!

The trip takes three and a half hours and is an adventure in itself. People, furniture, pigs, sometimes small cars, fruit, chickens, copra and a steer now and then—all these together and in great confusion on the *Moanatae's* deck.

The *Moanatae* has two diesels of different makes and two different-sized propellers, and in the middle of this passage on a windy day you have to be a good sailor. She measures sixty feet but carries a crew of five: Captain Mana; Toti, the engineer; Louis, the Chinese supercargo; and two deckhands. The *Moanatae* makes three round trips a week, no matter how bad the weather. The supercargo notes what bundles you are taking with you and charges you accordingly: twenty-five francs for a bicycle, ten francs for a large box, sack or crate, and anything else you have is judged by Louis and priced. It is an adjustable freight rate, for I have seen varying rates applied at different times. I have also seen a truck, minus engine, chassis and wheels being lashed on the *Moanatae's* tiny foredeck, one quarter of this load overlapping her port side as well as her starboard side all the way across from Papeete to Moorea, and with each roll of the vessel one of the two extremities of this truck touched the water. It is said on the waterfront in Papeete: "The *Moanatae* will take anything man can put on board."

Departure from Papeete is billed at nine a.m., but usually she casts her lines at ten or later. A multitude of last-minute freight is forever arriving, and the old Chinese ice-cream peddler does a good business, parked as he is with his tricycle right in front of the small gangway of the vessel. The Tahitian passengers make fun of themselves by saying to their friends ashore: "What goes down fast comes up fast," as they buy last minute ice-cream cones. I have never seen anybody get rattled or upset by the irregular departure of the *Moanatae*. What difference does it make whether you arrive in Moorea an hour or two later? At first I criticized this slipshod way of running a commercial vessel, but after a while I settled down to accept the Tahitian philosophy and found this much easier than getting upset.

Generally I would make my trip to Papeete as short as I could so that I could get back to Moorea as soon as possible. We would leave my beach in Moorea at six-thirty in the morning and arrive in Papeete at ten o'clock. Then I would check in at one of the small waterfront hotels and get a haircut before noon. Between eleven and half past one, Papeete is dead. No businesses are open; everyone eats and sleeps. By one-thirty everything is in full swing once more until five. In the afternoon I'd go about my business and buy treasures unobtainable in Moorea. I had a list and would end up with a weird assortment of purchases: gasoline, an additional length of garden hose, a few pounds of nails, paint for my canoe, and some canned food.

When my shopping was done I'd relax and usually team up with some of the local characters whom I learned to know pretty well.

The Cercle Polynesien is a bar run by a Frenchman and his wife. Monsieur Poggi is the friendliest bartender you would ever want to meet, and it was at his place that everyone congregated in the late afternoon hours. Situated on the first floor of the Stewart Hotel, smack on the waterfront and overlooking the inter-island schooners and visiting yachts, it was a most pleasant experience after my dry weeks in Moorea. It was great to swap gossip and drink cold beer again. If you think that South Sea characters are a thing of the past, you are mistaken. Papeete is loaded with them. Take my good friend, Ripley Gooding, for instance: a pleasant French Tahitian who at one time owned a restaurant in San Francisco called Ripley's. Since that venture, he has dabbled in everything, from transforming swamps to desirable properties to dealing in copra and mother-of-pearl. He has also built the only golf course in Papeete; he will invite you to a friendly nine holes with the smug look of one who knows just where every blade of grass is, simply because he put it there himself. One never fails to run into Ripley at the Cercle around four in the afternoon. He has a habit of getting the seat nearest to the window in the balcony, and he shouts or whistles to his friends and acquaintances walking in the street below. While you're climbing the filthy old stairs, he already has your drink ordered for you. One can always tell by Ripley's laughter, audible half a block away, that he is in session at the Cercle. This amiable character could spin tales about Tahiti by the hour if you were willing to listen. Usually he is joined by the town's leading pharmacist, and by another American who fives in Papeete, Darryl Shields. Darryl is also the Norwegian Consul, imports Swedish beer, and sells Tahitian pareus which he advertises in American magazines.

The next arrival in this growing fraternity is usually Captain Frame, the British pilot of the local inter-island plane which flies from Papeete to Bora-Bora. When Frame goes on his vacation, the plane is grounded and there is no air service between the islands until he gets back.

Occasionally Eddie Lund who runs Quinn's Bar down the street drops in. Mr. Cribblet, the Swiss botanist, comes in for his afternoon pick-me-up. The ample British Consul and Eric de Bisschop, who was planning to float a bamboo raft from Tahiti to Peru, generally joined up with the group; as well as Dr. Bonnet of the Filariasis Institute. By five o'clock we would have two or three tables linked together. I guess we were one of the best stations of the coconut radio, as most of us came from different parts of the island and each contributed his share of the gossip.

Thor Heyerdahl of Kontiki fame happened to be in town again on one of these occasions, and there is always a year-round sprinkling of yachtsmen. Papeete has more or less become a clearinghouse for this fortunate group of Bohemians of the seas. Countless yachts with crews of three, four or more arrive annually in Tahiti. After the long crossings, whether it be from Australia or America, crews get fed up with each other, and in Tahiti there is a chance to split up, take another yacht home, round the world or just to the next island. I have seen an English yacht with a crew of three arrive in Papeete. Each morning the members of this crew would go separately to the market and get their own individual food for the day, prepare it individually; such was the harmony when they arrived in Papeete!

Among waterfront circles, this is known as cabin fever. Conversation will come to a grinding halt in mid-Pacific and, weeks later, at opposite ends of some bar in Papeete, the main participants will pour out heavily biased versions of their stories to the barmaid who long ago became accustomed to these tirades and just lends a friendly ear because her business depends on it.

Of the five yachts which recently raced to Tahiti from San Pedro, California, not one returned with its original crew. One female crew member, I distinctly recall, cooked dinner on one yacht, breakfast on another, and by five o'clock that evening was sailing back to the States on yet a third yacht. All yachts left Tahiti with a new lease on life and in all probability ran into another crisis off the California coast. There are countless examples of this, and many of the American yachting crews are responsible for the lack of respect some of the French have at times for Americans.

Poggi, who has spent many years on this waterfront, will tell you of numerous instances of this, and it is one of his pet topics. He will recite the names of all the unfortunate yachts whose crews have broken up in the past. Then he will point out to you that there is only one way to travel on a yacht: by yourself. Next he will go into a long tirade on the successful single-handers who have passed through Tahiti, and he bangs his fist on the counter as he reiterates:

"They come up here to use my free showers, and I hear all their stories from every side. Ah, *Fiu alors*! I still say there is only one way. Go alone."

After breaking up at the Cercle, I'd go on a splurge and dine at the Yachtclub Restaurant. Prior to and after World War I, this was *the* yacht club and must have been a swanky place in Papeete. Now it looks run down, probably neglected because in a year or so the entire block will have to come down to make place for a new one. One can safely say that every character who ever drifted through Tahiti for the last forty years has been a patron. The food is quite good, and

anything you order that should be ice-cold really is ice-cold. Located as it is on the waterfront, fifty feet from the berths of the inter-island schooners and on the first floor of the building, it offers a clear view across the entire harbor and lagoon. One can see the pass in the reef and that wonderful sight of the sun setting behind distant Moorea.

The waitresses have long black hair down to their waists. This would never do in an American restaurant but, with the flower behind the ear and the winning smile, here it is right in place. I would usually eat a steak or two when I was here: it tasted so good after the steady fish diet.

Sometimes the picture was enhanced by the late arrival of one of the inter-island schooners, from the Tuamotus, the Gambiers or the Marquesas, or the Islands Below the Wind. Then you would really have a ringside seat to a waterfront show. Approaching her berth slowly, you might see the *Vaitere* or the *Benicia*, or the *Tiare Taporo*, maybe the *Tagua*. It makes no difference which; they all have that same South Sea charm stamped all over them.

A crowd will gather to greet friends, passengers and crew alike. The decks are piled as high as safety will allow, and then as high again as the supercargo sees fit, with copra and other merchandise. The passengers have their hands full of bundles and all kinds of stuff as they disembark from the vessel. There is a lot of shouting, laughter and tears of happiness as people meet again, the welcome anywhere in the world. Yes, a dinner at the Yachtclub is always an event.

The establishment caters not only to the romantically minded but to the historically inclined as well. In a little room behind the bar, used as an office, there is a hole in the wall. It is only a two-foot-square cavity in the plaster and brick. Beside it, on a little wooden shelf, is an unexploded shell. In 1914, the German cruisers *Scharnharst* and *Gneisenau* bombarded Papeete for twenty minutes. This particular shell first split a palm tree outside the restaurant, then came in through the open window and hurled itself through the far wall without exploding. It landed in the market place a block away, later was retrieved and placed on the shelf where it rests today, with the date underneath: 9/22/14. The room is not open to the public, but Monsieur Manin, the proprietor, is always glad to take a visitor in for a peek.

By eight p.m. I would feel the need for sleep; it was two hours past my regular bedtime. I was unused to a busy day in the city—for, compared to Moorea, Papeete really is a metropolis.

In the morning there was always another free Papeete show, the public market. One has never seen such a colorful conglomeration of foods: vegetables, cooked and raw meats, bakery goods and an immense assortment of fish and livestock.

People arrive at five in the morning from the surrounding districts to do their shopping. The crowd has the density of Grand Central Station at the rush hour. Generally I went there to watch the fun but usually ended by buying some oranges, which do not grow in Moorea, and maybe some tomatoes and cucumbers. The market place is also one of the big exchanges for local gossip. People who normally do not see each other during the day or maybe for days in a row meet and exchange the latest neighborhood scandals.

After the market, to the post office to mail letters written since the last time I was here. Whenever I looked at the long row of pigeonholes with mail for the outlying islands in them, waiting for the schooner, I got that nostalgic feeling. The name on each section is an index to the Islands of French Oceania, and my dormant wanderlust rose once more as I read them at random: Tahaa, Maupiti, Huahine, Uturoa, Tubai, Makatea, and many others. I would leave the post office with thoughts of future voyages tempting me, and these thoughts were further fired as I walked past the schooners. I've met most of their captains, and they are a fine bunch of Polynesian sailors.

CHAPTER 9

The harbor of Papeete is one of the few remaining authentic South Sea ports, and the change is slowly coming. Not so long ago I watched the old *Hiro* slip through the outer reef to begin a fifteen-day voyage to the Tuamotu Archipelago. Rapidly she became a silhouette growing tiny against the setting sun. One hour and fifteen minutes later, in the darkness of the tropical night, she was back in the harbor. Mechanical trouble? Sickness on board? Hurricane dead ahead? No, the reason was very simple: the captain had forgotten to leave his car keys ashore for his wife, and there are no locksmiths in Papeete. Such events are quite normal on the Papeete waterfront, and nobody thinks anything of them.

Fanciers of the South Sea trading schooners will not be disappointed—that is, if they get here in time; for Papeete has a fleet of authentic, dyed in the wool, written-about, aged, repatched-over-and-over trading schooners. Locally they are known as "goelettes." The Donald Company, one of the largest trading companies in the South Pacific, owns some of the nicer and better-kept of these grand old ladies of the sail. Their *Vaitere* and *Tiare Taporo* are the pride of this port. The Donald schooners, as well as every other schooner in Papeete harbor, have all the trimmings which through the years have become cliches to romanticists and writers. There are half-breed captains, swarthy mates, kanaka cooks and shrewd Chinese supercargos.

Almost every schooner has on board a regular trading store which is very much in demand at the less-frequented islands in French Oceania. Mother-of-pearl divers, copra planters, laborers, women and children come on board to buy necessities which their own little island cannot offer them. The schooners' trading stores are a very compact version of our old Western and Indian trading posts. They stock almost anything: calico, tobacco, fountain pens, candy, shoes, stationery, canned foods, blankets, toilet necessities, pots and pans and even plastic wares. All these items are legally tagged at a mere forty per cent above the Papeete normal retail prices.

Without doubt the most picturesque of Papeete's schooners is *Oiseau des Iles*, Bird of the Islands. This steel-hulled, three-masted schooner has been plying for countless years between the islands of Makatea and Papeete, carrying cargoes of phosphate. She is a fine example of French shipbuilding and saw the light of day in Nantes, France, in 1930. She has recently been up for sale, for the owners have replaced her by a modern, diesel-powered coastal vessel, *Oiseau*

des Iles, No. 2. Little by little, modern economy is edging in on Papeete's schooners. Every time a schooner is sold or lost on some distant reef (and most of them do meet that fate), it means a loss which will never be replaced. Certainly there will be a modern vessel to carry the cargo to its destination, but it is no longer the same thing. Schooners are decidedly uncomfortable, fairly dirty; they pitch and roll; there is no ice water; fresh food is limited to four or five days out of port, and they all reek of copra. Quarters are cramped and hot, yet they have that unmistakable South Sea charm which their more modern sisters lack and will never acquire. Let there be no doubt, when the last old-timer feels the penetrating coral against her keel, that will be the end of an era for Papeete, and the charm that had the power to stir the pens of Jack London, Somerset Maugham, James Michener, will be forever gone. Did not Michener write: . . . The *Mitiaro*, barely afloat limps in with a cargo of retching Chinese from Moorea, the boat of which it was said, 'when they tie up at the wharf people half a mile inland start to heave.' " The *Mitiaro* is a sturdy sixty-foot launch which has been running the eleven miles separating Papeete from Moorea since 1911. Do not let the word "launch" make you lose respect for this craft, for she can carry almost anything on her decks, just as the *Moanatae* can. In February 1957 the owners decided to sell her and leave the Papeete-Moorea run to competitors. The old *Mitiaro* was transferred to a long-distance haul, two hundred miles to the Tuamotus. Two months later she once more limped into Papeete. She had taken a terrible beating. Now she occupies a quiet corner in the harbor awaiting the owners' decision.

The Mormon Mission owns a schooner used in their missionary work among the islands. Once the beautiful American yacht *Fandango*, she now sports the Polynesian name of *Paraita*. The San Francisco-built *Tagua*, constructed in 1909, runs regularly between Tahiti and the Gambier Islands, a thousand miles away. The round trip takes twenty-five days. One can make a voyage on almost any of these inter-island schooners for about $4.80 per day. This of course includes transportation and food. As mentioned before, you will have little comfort. Strange men and women will share your quarters. However, you will soon forget these discomforts but you will never, never forget the beauty of the atolls you have visited, for they are the magic circles in the South Seas. No large ships can take you there, and your passport to the atolls is the trading schooner. The visitor who comes to Papeete by liner or plane, staying for two or three weeks, may return to San Francisco, Chicago or Texas thinking he has seen the South Seas because he has been to Papeete. Nothing could be less true. There is only one way: the interisland schooner. Then you will ride up on the reef in whaleboats or go through passes where there are passes;

you will see lagoons so magnificent in color that your friends will not believe your descriptions. They will ridicule your photography by saying, “Those colors could not possibly be true.”

You will drink coffee brewed in cistern water and eat sea-swallow eggs, coconut crabs. You will meet unforgettable characters on these atolls, white men who for some reason spend a lifetime on these fly specks in the South Pacific. You will truly see the South Seas as a fiction writer wants you to see it. Still, you must first come to Papeete and, if you’re the romantic kind, your heart will accelerate as you wander down to the Papeete waterfront reading the names of the schooners: *Florence Robinson, Nicole, Vahinano, Vaininiiore, Suzanne, Stella Maris, Moanatae, Tamarii Tahiti, Tamara, Hotu, Denise* and many more. The *Tamara* is the official French Government schooner. She makes the rounds of the islands, sometimes with the Governor, colonial administrators and smaller government fry. Islands without policemen or law courts bring their disputes under the *Tamara’s* awnings, and in some sheltered lagoon the *Tamara* then becomes a French law court.

In one corner of Papeete harbor, dry-docked and bleaching in the sun, lies the old Chinese junk, *Cheng Ho*. Once she was well known in Honolulu waters, and her life history could easily fill a best seller, but today she is being rebuilt for local use and will end her days bringing copra from the outer islands to Papeete. Work proceeds on her reconditioning periodically when there are enough funds.

Roughly speaking, there are about 140 islands in French Oceania, and all of these are serviced from Papeete. Service is scheduled and fairly regular to some islands. In many cases, however, it is quite irregular and depends on demand. Then you will see blackboards here and there on the waterfront, outside Chinese stores (just as in San Francisco during the Barbary Coast period):

> *La Goelette Vaitaporo quittera Papeete demain soir pour les Australes. Escale sera faite d Rurutu, Tubuai, Raevavae, Anaa. Il existe encore place pour passagers et cargo*. (Tomorrow night the schooner Vaitaporo will sail for the Austral islands. Stops will be made at Rurutu, Tubuai, Raevavae, Anaa, etc. There is still space for passengers and cargo.)

Of course, there is always space for passengers and cargo. Even if it seems physically impossible, place will be made, for every bale and every passenger is additional revenue to the owners. Papeete’s schooners boast a colorful group of captains. They are far from our gold-braided skippers, but nevertheless they are shrewd navigators. The Polynesians always have been navigators. For the most part, these captains belong to the dead-reckoning school of navigation, that is,

they compute their positions by observing the point of departure and then take time, wind, drift and the ship's speed into account.

It takes all kinds to make a port such as Papeete: foreign cargo vessels, local schooners, the occasional visiting liner and the yachts. Papeete has been host to these since the days of Captain Cook. Crews have rebelled, jumped ship, mutinied to get back to Papeete. Start with Captain Bligh, and end up with a recent yacht which long overstayed its visit in Papeete. People on the waterfront are still wondering whether that cracked piston which had to be replaced all the way from the U.S.A, really was cracked. A new piston arrived by airmail, special delivery, and then was conveniently left in a car overnight, only to be found missing the next morning, to the great delight of the crew who were thus forced to stay longer in this wonderful port.

Most who have come to Papeete once have gone away with one thing only in mind—to return as soon as possible.

And so, my time in Papeete up, I wandered down the waterfront, back to the little *Moanatae* by nine a.m., just in case she decided to sail on time.

As we once more approached the island of Moorea, I felt the hush and the quiet. Peace is everywhere. Although only eleven miles away from the city, it is completely unaffected by it. You enter the pass and cross the lagoon to the first place of call, Maharepa. Anyone not busy or not having a siesta is on the wharf, and news is exchanged as merchandise and people are put ashore.

Louis the supercargo usually has a list of personal shopping which he does for the islanders, thus saving them from having to go across and bringing additional profit into his own pocket.

Past the wharf is the white coral beach and the clearest water imaginable. Papeete is a faint blur in the background, visually as well as mentally, for you find yourself switching back to the beloved, slowed-down island tempo. Then the *Moanatae* is off to the next place: Pao Pao. Routine is the same here, only a steer which was being unloaded fell between the vessel and the wharf. Everybody got into the act and helped lift the heavy animal onto the platform. There was a lot of laughing, shouting and excitement over the incident.

Then the *Moanatae* chugged along inside the reef and entered Papetoai Bay to drop me off at my beach. I would almost feel like shouting, "I'm home again!" I was happy to be back in my little kingdom, yet I had been gone only a little over twenty-four hours.

I would always bring back simple gifts for Emil and his family: candy for the kids, soap for his wife and fishhooks for himself. The entire expense would be no more than a dollar or so, but you would

think I had given them Papeete. I was always happy to do something for them, but immediately I would become indebted to them, for Emil's wife would not listen to my protestations, and I would have to eat with them right now. And so back to the raw fish, the breadfruit and the banana poi.

CHAPTER 10

After a few months I succeeded in removing all the rubble and broken cement and in generally cleaning up the place. The rats were under control, and the land crabs slowly diminishing. The place was in good shape, and I started concentrating on the banding of coconut trees. The trees have to be encircled with a metal band. Rats nest in the upper fronds, the heart of the coconut tree. Eventually when the rat is in heat it wanders down the tree to climb up into another tree. It can go down over the band but cannot return to its nest. Thus in time it is forced away from the tree, and this results in a great saving in copra, for rats cause much damage to the nuts.

Many days passed quickly in a most leisurely manner. I was very fond of the large native outrigger canoe which belongs to the estate. It is made of a very tough wood called *mara* and has seen more than twenty years of service. I would take this canoe out to the shoals inside the reef and drift along, watching submarine life, picking up shells and spearing fish. The colors among the fish never ceased to fascinate me, and the water is cleaner than the most luxurious swimming pool. Time passed so hastily while I was fooling around the reef that I sometimes found an entire day used up in doing just that.

One day I found myself toying with an idea: a little trip to one of the atolls. I had heard that the *Hiro* makes a voyage about once every three months to the island of Mopelia. As this island is privately owned, one has to move in a roundabout way to get permission to go there. I had a special reason for wanting to go to Mopelia. One day, while in Papeete, I made inquiries.

Monsieur Robert Hervée leaned back in the chair at his desk in the Papeete office of the Compagnie Francaise de Tahiti.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but we do not accept tourists on this voyage of the *Hiro.* Besides, there are no facilities for guests on the islands of Mopelia, Scilly or Bellingshausen. Copra is our business, and the loading is a tedious chore. When the last sack comes on board, we do not want to be obliged to comb the beaches for erring passengers."

I saw that Monsieur Hervée had his mind made up. He was chartering the vessel from her Chinese owners for a ten-day voyage to the islands of Mopelia, Scilly and Bellingshausen. His interest was copra and the fastest way of getting it back to the Papeete market. His answer made it plain to me that any passenger would be looked upon as a possible cause for delays. As he was the ranking representative for his company in French Oceania I realized that I would have to try another approach. I explained that I had had long years of

employment with steamship companies and pointed out my recent association with the Darr Lines operating the schooner *Te Vega* between Honolulu and Tahiti. I also mentioned that I was residing on the nearby island of Moorea and therefore should not be categorized as an average tourist. Furthermore, I firmly impressed upon Monsieur Hervée the fact that with my shipping background I fully understood his problems and would not be likely to increase them.

Monsieur Hervée swallowed, looked around as if for support from his array of Chinese office clerks, threw up his hands and said, “What do you expect to do in Mopelia? We stay there only one day on the outward voyage and half a day on the way back. There is nothing to see; it is only a small atoll.”

I replied, "I just want to see what the island looks like. I understand that your company has these three islands on a long-term lease from the French Government, and without your approval I’d never get a chance to see them.”

At last Monsieur Hervée became human and relented. “*Bon!* I will allow you to make the trip then, but I want you to know that it is indeed a great exception. Very few Frenchmen get a chance to visit these islands, and I can assure you that fewer Americans have been there. We are very emphatic about this rule and do not easily break it. We shall look upon you as being, shall we say, *du métier*; also, I must warn you that the *Hiro* is far from a luxury ship. Come back to this office in about ten days, and I will be able to give you the exact sailing date. At present the *Hiro* is in the Tuamotu Islands. You can settle your fare at this office after the voyage. It will be a daily rate, but you make your arrangements for meals with the supercargo on board.”

I took leave of Monsieur Hervée in high spirits.

I must explain at this point my reasons for wanting to visit Mopelia. I wanted to inspect what remained of Count Felix von Luckner’s famous *Seeadler* which had been thrown on the reef off Mopelia in 1917. Yet for reasons which I shall outline, I could not mention this to Monsieur Hervée. He might have refused altogether to grant me passage on the *Hiro*, using my explanation as additional support for his reluctance to sanction this voyage. I dared not take a chance.

Count Felix von Luckner is a touchy subject in French Oceania. Although he was the most considerate enemy any man could desire, nevertheless Tahiti is reluctant to be impressed by this man’s unusual methods of warfare.

During the late thirties, von Luckner visited Papeete while on a round-the-world trip on his private yacht, the *Vaterland*. He stepped ashore in Papeete and went to the little park on the waterfront where

one of his cannons from the *Seeadler* had found a last resting place. Affectionately he patted the cannon and had a picture of himself taken in the act. Some of the population went to the Governor and complained. The Governor pointed out that there was no longer a war on, and that the man had done nothing wrong. What was bad about a man having his picture taken standing beside a gun? Then the critics brought up the fact that the *Vaterland* was run as a very tight ship. With all the saluting on board, they might well be naval spies disguised as yachtsmen. Again nothing was proven or could be done about it. Then von Luckner, at some social affair, was said to have made the following remark: "If ever there is another war between France and Germany, we will win."

Whether he actually did make this statement or not, the rumor did not increase his popularity. He had visited the island of Moorea and had been the guest of my neighbor, Medford Kellum, in whose guest book he had written, ". . . with 124,000 tons of good wishes to the Kellums . . . The Sea Devil!"

Now, to a town bitter at having been bombarded for twenty minutes in 1914 by the German heavy cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, all these facts prevented a proper appreciation of von Luckner, and this is regrettable, for his record is one of the most fascinating stories to emerge from World War I.

While in European waters in 1914, the American Clipper ship *Pass of Balmaha*, bound for Russia with a cargo of cotton, found herself subjected to an inspection by a British Naval craft. Suspected of bearing contraband, she was ordered to a British port with a British prize crew on board. The British lowered the Stars and Stripes and proceeded with the Red Duster. While on her new course, the vessel was intercepted by a German U-boat. The British flag was reason enough to warrant capture and, accordingly, she was brought into a German port as a prize of war. There the *Pass of Balmaha* underwent a drastic change. From a peaceful barque (a reminder of that disappearing era of sail) she was transformed into an armed surface raider. The thoroughness of this preparation left nothing to be desired: secret elevators, 400 bunks intended as quarters for future prisoners, guns, two 500-HP diesel engines and a crack crew of sixty-four German naval officers and men.

In charge of this amazing craft was Count Felix von Luckner. Brushing aside many naval officers with higher seniority, this able man had come to the attention of the Kaiser. His earlier training and experience on sailing vessels was unparalleled by any officer in the Imperial German Navy. He might have been called the Kaiser's protege in some circles at that time; nevertheless, he was a true sailor and, as was proven, the Kaiser had made a good choice.

We have read many fabulous accounts of World War I, but none with an appeal, variety of experience and daring equal to Count Felix von Luckner's. With typical Teutonic precision and discipline, von Luckner's crew was drilled endlessly and led to make believe that the now-named *Seeadler* was the Norwegian barque *Irma*.

On Christmas Day 1916, she managed to fool the inspecting British destroyer *Avenger*, stationed north of the Shetlands. On her way to raid Allied shipping in the Atlantic, the *Seeadler* outwitted the British inspecting blockade officer from the *Avenger* with such faultless masquerade and ingenious deception that, von Luckner later admitted, had he himself been the inspecting officer he too would have granted the vessel freedom to proceed.

A long, impressive fist of victims fell to von Luckner and his crew. Italian, British, French, Canadian and, later on, American, sailing vessels and steamers were captured by what appeared to be a friendly neutral sailing vessel, approaching broadsides with a request for a time signal or the latest gossip of the war. What Allied captain's heart did not warm up at the sight of another lonely windjammer in mid-Atlantic? The dénouement would always come abruptly and precisely: Down would come the Norwegian flag, up would go the German ensign, gun crews would appear on the *Seeadler's* decks suddenly, ready at deadly point-blank range. Crews were captured, ships sunk, and on neither side of the Atlantic was there any clue as to what had happened. Many Allied merchantmen were kept from sailing and insurance rates went sky high, because of the realization that an enemy was still at large.

While Count Felix von Luckner operated in this way, fifteen ships were captured and 124,000 gross tons of Allied shipping sunk at a total loss of twenty-five million dollars. Once aboard the *Seeadler*, captured crews were well fed and exceptionally well treated —"visitors," von Luckner called them. Captains of captured vessels formed the elite "Captains' Club" and were looked upon by the Count as guests. Von Luckner, a sailor himself, did not believe that a sailor on an enemy ship doing his duty for his country should be mistreated. To him these men were all members of the brotherhood of the sea.

On March 21, 1917, in mid-Atlantic, the French barque *Cambronne* was captured. She was the twelfth ship, and the *Seeadler* was now filling up with "visitors and guests." Von Luckner had the uppermasts of the *Cambronne* cut down. He then appointed one of his captured captains as master and the 350 odd crew members of the eleven sunken ships were transferred to the *Cambronne*. First, however, he paid off every man the equivalent of the salary he would have earned had he been on his own ship. The newly appointed master of the *Cambronne* was so impressed with the Count's

gentlemanly tactics that he readily gave his word not to hail any ship until Rio de Janeiro was made. It was an agreement between two gentlemen and was kept. Under reduced sail, the *Cambronne* made Rio in fourteen days.

The world was agog. “Get von Luckner,” cried the Allied Naval Command. Meanwhile, the cunning von Luckner took the *Seeadler* around the Horn and quietly slipped into the Pacific. Three more captures followed, all three American sailing vessels. Then, after seven months of raiding, with 30,000 miles of distance covered, von Luckner decided a rest was in order. He proceeded to the lonely atoll of Mopelia in French Oceania to refresh the crew and to vary their diet somewhat, prior to resuming his raids. Even a crack crew will show fatigue in time.

It is noteworthy that, though he sank fourteen out of fifteen ships captured, not one human life was lost, either enemy or crew. After the war, von Luckner was decorated by the Pope for his outstanding humanitarian conduct. The cities of Miami and San Francisco even went so far as to confer honorary citizenship upon the Count. His own country pronounced him above the law; in other words, he could do no wrong in Germany.

Mopelia is a typical South Sea atoll, that is, a ring of coral growth in the sea. At some points, sand and earth have been washed onto this reef, and coco palms and low brush have started growing. Thus small low islands are formed on this ring at irregular intervals.

The entire atoll of Mopelia is a circle with a diameter of approximately six to seven miles. On July 29, 1917, von Luckner brought the *Seeadler* to the entrance of this lagoon. At one point there is a pass into the lagoon where the water is deep and sheltered. Unfortunately for the *Seeadler* the pass was not deep enough to afford her a passage. The pass measured sixteen feet deep, whereas the *Seeadler* drew twenty-two feet. Von Luckner anchored outside by the pass and tethered the *Seeadler* to the reef. The prevailing winds and current from the lagoon kept her from touching the reef.

All hands were disembarked onto the main island, five miles away. A regular village was soon formed: Broadway at 42nd and Potsdammerplatz became the centers of the American and German crews. As von Luckner jocularly recalled, it was the last German Colony. Then sudden disaster struck. A tidal wave lifted the *Seeadler* from her anchorage and tossed her onto the reef. The wave was estimated to be forty-five feet in height, and the ship’s engines could not be started in time. The date was August 2, 1917. Three weeks later, von Luckner and five others escaped in a rerigged lifeboat and made for the Cook Islands. Under the guise of shipwrecked Dutch seamen they obtained additional water and provisions and befriended

a French resident priest. The priest is now the Catholic Bishop of Tahiti. From the Cook Islands von Luckner made for the Fijian Islands where they were captured. The rest of the crew and the Americans remained in Mopelia until the French schooner *Lutece* appeared.

I spoke with a Tahitian who was engineer on the *Lutece* in 1917. He was pointed out to me in Papeete. I got the following story from him:

"Yes, I remember the incident quite well. We had approached Mopelia on the *Lutece* heading for the pass when we saw a vessel on the reef. As we had no news of any recent disaster, we went in closer to investigate. A whaleboat came toward us with a single man in it. As he came alongside, a tarpaulin was thrown aside and a machine gun and boarding crew faced us. The *Lutece* was taken by the Germans and we were made to prepare the ship for sea. I escaped into the bushes and hid myself as I did not wish to be taken to sea by the Germans. However, the *Lutece* left with Germans only, leaving the Tahitians and the Americans on Mopelia. That was the last I saw of her."

The *Lutece* was wrecked on Easter Island, and the entire crew was later interned in Chile. That day in 1918 when the news flashed around the world that Germany had surrendered, Dr. Pietsch, the *Seeadler's* surgeon, died of a heart attack. He was the only casualty of this story. As for the American and Tahitian crews left behind on Mopelia, they were later picked up by the Japanese cruiser *Usuma* and taken to Samoa.

Many years ago I became acquainted with this story and, being somewhat a sailor at heart, have always had a high esteem for von Luckner. Now, while residing in French Oceania, I decided to make a pilgrimage to the last scene of this World War I drama.

On April 23, 1956, I boarded the *Hiro* in Papeete. To my great surprise Monsieur Robert Hervée had chosen this trip for one of his periodic inspection tours of his company's islands. We shared a cabin.

Every three months the *Hiro* is sent to Mopelia, Scilly and Bellingshausen in order to collect copra. The charts show these islands spelled as above, but to Tahitian mariners they are respectively known as Maupihaa, Fenua Manua and Motu One.

The *Hiro* was indeed far from a luxury ship. At one time, as a prosaic American multimillionaire's floating palace under the name *Memory*, she was featured in many silent motion pictures. Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin and a score of others have walked her decks. Brought to Tahiti in 1937 by the late Lew Hirshon, she underwent a change and was adapted to local trade conditions. One of her two smokestacks was removed, and the entire superstructure was enlarged; this gave her that typical, top-heavy look so frequently seen on vessels in this part of the world. Yes, the *Memory* had indeed

changed. Furthermore, nineteen years of South Sea tramping had left their mark and also their smell on her. No question about what she had carried most during the last two decades: copra, of course.

Under the command of the genial Tahitian Captain Anai, the *Hiro* headed for the island of Raiatea first. Monsieur Hervée explained to me that we had to pick up eleven mother-of-pearl divers at Raiatea and transport them to the island of Scilly where, for the first time in eleven years, the diving season had been reopened. Also a district judge was to join the ship in Raiatea, since some legal work required his presence in Mopelia.

We arrived in Raiatea the next morning. By ten a.m. the divers were on board with all their gear and necessities for a three months' stay on Scilly. They would be unloaded on the deserted atoll called Motu Fara, not far away from Scilly. They piled on board like a circus ready for the road. Outboard motors, pigs, outrigger canoes, wives and children, drums of gasoline and kerosene, stalks of bananas, barrels full of Ernes, bales, crates and packages of every size and description were among their possessions. The judge became the third man in my cabin.

At 10:30 a.m. the *Hiro* should have departed, but it appeared that the best diver of the group had not yet arrived. A radio message from the island of Huahine had announced his departure from there earlier in the morning. We went to the *Hiro's* bridge and scanned the water between Raiatea and distant Huahine. With much eyestrain, we made out a speck coming our way, no doubt the missing diver.

At noon, with all the divers on board, we were on our way to Mopelia. Since we had left about two hours later than scheduled, this would mean arriving at Mopelia two hours late. This pleased me very much, for it meant arriving at the pass into the lagoon at eight in the morning (by daylight) instead of at six. I was up at four the next morning. By seven a dark outline on the horizon indicated the location of Mopelia—low, flat, and spread out. We rounded the island from the north to the northwest side where the pass is situated. Running parallel to the reef and quite close to the breakers, we approached the pass. With my binoculars I was observing every foot of the island-studded reef. The *Hiro* slowed down and made a sharp turn to port, and this lined her up with the pass. I scrutinized the right-hand side of the pass and immediately identified a group of dark objects on the reef. Spread over a large area, various parts of the *Seeadler* were now plainly visible above the water. Some portions were as high as six feet above the surface.

Now the *Hiro* was fast entering the pass and going straight into a six-mile current coming from the lagoon into the open sea. The vessel had about six feet clearance on each side of the pass. The water was

crystal clear, and one could see every detail of the treacherous sides and the bottom of the pass.

Various sections of the *Seeadler* were now recognizable: a cabin top, the remains of a tank, various sailing-vessel deck accessories. These were all rusty, twisted, and they covered a large section of the reef close to the pass. In another minute the *Hiro* had slipped into the lagoon, and the undergrowth on the islet by the pass hid the wreckage. Monsieur Hervée came up to me and pointed out that the remains he had seen me observe so keenly were those of the German raider, *Seeadler*. I acted quite nonchalant and thanked him for his information.

The *Hiro*, well inside the lagoon by now, turned to port and headed for the little village about four miles away on the main island. We came to anchor about three hundred yards off shore in a wonderful South Sea setting. The water ran from the deepest blue to the palest green as depths diminished, and the lagoon was fringed by a spotless white beach. Native huts stood among the numerous coconut palms. The huts were all of the palm-frond style, native architecture, looking clean and neat in the early morning. I went ashore in the first whaleboat to leave the *Hiro*.

I had been ashore five minutes when I realized that I was walking in a veritable open-air museum of *Seeadler* relics. The village was just loaded with every possible piece of equipment you could imagine. To a trained eye, it was no feat to note that a large, square metal frame, hanging from a tree with a hammer by its side, actually had at one time been a spar support on a sailing vessel. Now that its raiding days were finished, it was used as a peaceful reminder of mealtimes and was rung as a gong to summon the laborers to work. A few steps further, a complete donkey diesel engine with what remained of an ancient generator almost blocked the entrance to one of the huts. It was black and rusty, and children were playing around it. I saw a concrete water cistern which had a ladder sunk into the cement. This was a typical ship's engine-room ladder, also at one time part of the *Seeadler*. There was a copra shed supported by what very evidently were cut-up sections of spars. In an outrigger canoe, attached to a coconut fiber line was an old piston from the *Seeadler's* main engine. Now it served as an anchor. A large pile of rusted anchor chain served as a good place for a native to dry his fish nets. In some of the huts, and especially that of the overseer, I noticed pieces of furniture that were made of woods which were definitely not of local origin. In short, right and left, the remains of this ship were still put into service in some form or other. The multitude of remnants from the *Seeadler* was so impressive that the uninformed visitor might have thought they were relics of a recent disaster.

Yes, there could be no doubt; this was the place von Luckner had dubbed "the last German Colony," and I was walking the streets of what had been Seeadlerburg. It was quite evident that few outsiders in search of souvenirs had visited this island. The village stands on the very same spot where the German settlement had once stood.

I spoke with some of the island's seventeen inhabitants regarding these remnants: " . . this and that came from the German ship," they all agreed, but most of them were completely ignorant and disinterested in the history behind these articles. Some had heard of von Luckner, others had no knowledge of him whatsoever.

Mr. Antonio Leboucher, the French overseer of this island, was most kind and obliging to me. He confirmed the fact that the Count had revisited Mopelia in 1938. Leboucher was one of the few I encountered in French Oceania who knew the entire history of von Luckner. He ended his opinion with the comment: "*C'était un as.*" (He was an ace.)

I wandered around the village once more and noticed several pieces of red-copper engine-room tubing ingeniously applied to local plumbing. I saw several more "gongs" and came upon a concrete pounder made out of an empty 4½-inch shell casing which had been filled with cement and a wooden handle sunk into it.

As I returned to the *Hiro*, preparations were being made by the chief engineer and some of the divers to take the ship's whaleboat to one of the outer islets where tens of thousands of birds nest. The sea swallows breed at this time of the year, and so do the gooney birds and bos'n birds, and their eggs are in great demand by the natives. I saw my chance to get to the wreckage on the reef.

The bird islet is located only a mile or so further than the pass through which we had entered that morning. We took off and powered up the lagoon. When we were abreast of the little island flanked on one side by the pass, I approached the helmsman and requested that he drop me off there so that I could take some pictures. I assured him I had seen plenty of birds and eggs in my lifetime and preferred taking pictures right here. My request was promptly granted, and the whaleboat dropped me off on the tiny islet. Then they went on to gather their eggs, promising to return for me on their way back. Everything was running smoothly, and I was alone on the islet with an hour or so to do as I pleased. I had with me a Tahitian woven basket which contained my camera, an empty copra sack, diving faceplate and rubber shoes.

Quickly I went from the lagoon side of the islet to the ocean side. In the middle of this islet with underbrush growing on it, I spotted a completely rusted-away water tank. I could tell by its shape that it had been a ship's water tank, and some of the old cement lining was still

visible. I took a picture of it and went on. I reached the ocean side of the island, and now only two hundred yards separated me from the fatal reef upon which were visible the remains of the *Seeadler*. I stopped and took in the scene. It was hard to realize that these chunks of rust lying in five or six feet of water had once been a fine sailing vessel. Luckily the water was clear, for a considerable part of this wreckage was submerged. There was no sun, a slight squall was blowing; a few seagulls were flying over me, disturbed at the sight of an invader. The breakers on the reef kept up their centuries-old rumble. The sadness of this setting was made all the more acute by its utter loneliness and isolation.

I entered the water. The coral was solid, old and black, and sharp as knives. Small eels and fish darted out of my way. I held my basket high and waded toward the nearest piece of metal. This had at first appeared to be a cabin top, but upon closer inspection I decided that the manhole openings indicated that this must have been a fuel tank. I rested my belongings on the tank, climbed on it and sat down. The sun came out and hurriedly I took some pictures. Everywhere I looked were pieces of rusted deck and engine room accessories: iron fittings, rusted cables, a deck-winch, rusted framework of large multiple blocks, the topmast cradle and many more fragments. The main section of the hull had long ago slipped off the reef into deep water. I wandered around in five feet of water, half swimming, half walking. Every now and then I would float in order to observe the bottom better.

Imagine my amazement when I stumbled on some old shell casings. They were immediately recognizable under water due to the verdigris on the brass. Their green hue was in sharp contrast to the rusty color of the other debris. I stooped and picked one up. There was no question that this was a 120-mm. shell casing. It was still in quite fair condition, and I took a piece of coral and scratched the shell with it. Under the green film there was bright brass. The shell was still half filled with long straw-like twigs which I later found to be cordite. I walked back to my fuel tank and put the shell into the copra sack. I repeated this four times and then concentrated on other objects. To be able to find shell casings just for the picking was evidence that few people had passed through here during the last forty years. There were more than I could carry.

Many interesting pieces of the *Seeadler* had already become one with the reef, the latter completely framing or encircling some piece of metal, so that it looked partly frozen as in a block of ice. I managed to pry loose from the reef what evidently had been an ax, also a small table bell, both of these minus their wooden handles. A bronze deck fitting, which hardly showed the ravages of time, also found its way

into my sack. A twisted length of red-copper engine-room tubing was the next item I picked up. There were many larger, more interesting relics, but I kept in mind that I had those two hundred yards to cover on my way back to the islet. I could not resist picking up the base of a shell on which only about an inch or so of the side walls remained. These were jagged and highly irregular. This was proof that after the *Seeadler's* loss explosives had been used to dismast her, to prevent attracting outside attention. A fire had started and the forward ammunition magazine had exploded. Of course the shell casings I collected were of shells which had never been fired. The damage they had suffered was evidently caused by an accidental explosion. This explained the cordite in one of the shells and also the fact that the initial fuse caps were still intact.

By now my bag had become heavy and, besides, it was time for my return to the meeting place. A small piece of the hull, with a rivet in it, was my final acquisition. Never in my life have I walked two hundred yards under more adverse conditions. I held the basket with the camera in it high up in my left hand, while my right was steadying the load on my right shoulder: the copra sack with about 110 lbs. of *Seeadler* in it. Add to this discomfort the fact that I was walking in five feet of water, avoiding pieces of wreckage and coral holes. Many a time I contemplated dropping my sack and forgetting about the relics, but I doggedly fought on and eventually reached the shore. There I had to sit down and take a very necessary rest before proceeding. Then I divided my load and made two trips across the islet, just in time to be picked up by the whaleboat.

Once more we crossed the lagoon on our way back to the *Hiro*. I planned to dispose of my “salvage.” Part of it would be given to the Maritime Museum in Honolulu; part I would keep for myself to remind me of this unforgettable day in Mopelia. However, as a final disposition, I wanted to give to Count Felix von Luckner some mementoes of his lost friend, the *Seeadler*. I knew that at the time Count von Luckner was planning another voyage around the world under sail.

Here follows the complete list of von Luckner’s captures:

GLADYS ROYAL
English steamer; Captured January 9, 1917

LUNDY ISLE
English steamer; Captured January 10, 1917

CHARLES GOUNOD
French barque; Captured January 21, 1917

PERCY
Canadian schooner; Captured January 24, 1917

ANTONIN
French barque; Captured February 3, 1917

BUENOS AIRES
Italian schooner; Captured February 9, 1917

PINMORE
English barque; Captured February 19, 1917

BRITISH YEOMAN
Canadian barque; Captured February 26,1917

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD
French barque; Captured February 27, 1917

DUPLEIX
French barque; Captured March 5, 1917

HORNGARTH
English steamer; Captured March 11, 1917

CAMBRONNE (sent to Rio)
French barque; Captured March 21, 1917

A.B. JOHNSON
American schooner; Captured June 8, 1917

R.C. SLADE
American schooner; Captured June 18, 1917

MANILA
American schooner; Captured July 8, 1917

CHAPTER 11

Once more the *Hiro* got under way and set its course for the pass. This time, instead of bucking the current, she would be pulled through the channel by the strong current not unlike a cork going round a corner in a gutter after a heavy rainfall.

Anai stood on the little bridge outside the charthouse where the helmsman was. The sun was just about setting directly opposite, and visibility was seriously impeded by the reflection on the water in the vicinity of the pass which ran due West. Several Tahitian sailors stood around Anai as he tried to locate the exact position of the narrow channel through which he had to take the *Hiro*. The sailors were adding their suggestions as to where they thought the channel was. Eventually they seemed to agree and, with both arms outstretched, Anai stood with his back to the helmsman on the bridge. Suddenly there was a little flutter of his right hand, and the man at the wheel reacted by letting the wheel spin. Then Anai's left hand commanded an opposing maneuver. I stood watching this pantomime, fascinated. Not a word was said. How was the helmsman to know just how much port or starboard rudder to give, as Anai's hands were fluttering the *Hiro* through the pass?

A perceptible acceleration in the speed of the vessel informed me that we were now in line with the pass and being drawn out by the current. Visibility was, of course, very good in our immediate vicinity, and the little island with the wreckage of the *Seeadler* shot past us on our port side. Anai kept up his manual aid to navigation until the vessel was clear of the surging water where the current from the pass met the incoming ocean swells. The faultless maneuver gave me the thrill of a roller-coaster ride. I could imagine many of my old sea captains shuddering at the manner in which this gracious exit from the pass had taken place, but Anai thought nothing of it, and once outside he gave the man at the wheel the course which would take us to Scilly. Then, as if reading my thoughts, he smiled at me and said: "Well, Rafi, how did you like that?"

I had but one answer for Anai, and I gave it to him straight: "Captain, that was remarkable!"

At dinnertime the old *Hiro* tossed and rolled. She pitched and strained her old timbers, and I wondered how long ago she had passed classification, if at all. The table had fewer occupants that evening, but René the leader of the divers, Awah the supercargo, and I decided not to let Anai down. Needless to say, as we had thousands of sea-swallow eggs on board the cook outdid himself: there was egg broth,

egg-and-potato salad, egg-and-parsley omelettes and, throughout the meal, an immense bowl of hard-boiled eggs on the table. These dishes were just thrown in, in addition to the regular meal which consisted of raw fish, turtle liver and curried pork with rice.

Anai was a big eater and an endless talker. However, his chatter was interesting and studded with stories accumulated from years of navigation among almost all the islands in French Oceania. There was not a harbor or anchorage about which Anai did not have some tale with a personal slant. His knowledge of the ocean, the reefs and the lagoons in these parts was phenomenal. I enjoyed listening to him but had to prod him from time to time, for he much preferred hearing about life in Honolulu and America where he had never been but hoped to go some day. I realized that here was a shrewd Polynesian seaman who had learned his trade from boyhood the hard way, and I respected him for it. There was nothing about Anai that was gold braid, but I could not resist asking him about his cap; it was so incongruous with his profession. There was a big laugh at the table when my question came out. Evidently I was the only one there who was not familiar with the history of this cap.

The captain and crew of the *Hiro* do not wear uniforms; they just wear what goes best with their respective jobs. Anai has an uncle who is the bandmaster of the public park band in Papeete. When the latter purchased a new cap, he jocularly gave the old one to Anai, telling him that it would lend decorum to the *Hiro*. Anai accepted the cap and wears it continually. It is just an old beat-up bandmaster's cap with the traditional musician's emblem on it, a lyre and two laurel leaves.

These evening sessions with Anai and anyone else at the table in the insufficiently-lighted dining room of the tossing old *Hiro* always reminded me of a Maugham play: each of my table companions was an unforgettable character, and from the interlocked memories of these men came many a good yam.

As I looked across the table to René Sanquer I felt the authenticity of his personality: a true South Sea soldier of fortune. René is small and wiry; his eyes have a continuously furtive look about them. I estimated him to be in his early fifties, but his physique does not show it. When you first look at René, you are vaguely reminded of the tenacity of a bulldog. His voice is almost completely gone and sounds like a voice that has drunk itself into oblivion. Underneath these harsh physical traits, however, there is a good heart, for I think that René would give you—well, maybe split with you—his last hundred francs if you needed them badly enough. On his face you can perhaps read between the weather-beaten lines the story of past struggles. It is usually the same old story down here: copra, mother-of-pearl, women, liquor and possibly a fast franc here and there, just within the limits of

the law. Of mixed blood, but more French than Tahitian, René gives you the impression that he can take care of himself in any situation.

His home is in Raiatea, but the islands and atolls are as much home to him as the many vessels that have transported him to the scenes of his activity. His latest enterprise was that of reopening the diving for mother-of-pearl in Scilly. First he obtained permission on a percentage basis from Hervée to use one of the atolls in the Scilly lagoon. Then he obtained sanction from the Government to dive in the lagoon.

The quality of the shell had been pretty bad at the last diving, eleven years before. So the Government which controls all mother-of-pearl diving closed the Scilly lagoon and gave the oysters a chance to improve their quality.

Most divers preferred to go to the Tuamotu Islands as soon as the season opened rather than take a chance in a lagoon which had proven a bad gamble at the last operation. Not René. Anything that was a gamble was right up his alley. He went about gathering a handful of divers and equipment. The divers were under contract to him, and he paid them for the weight of mother-of-pearl brought up. Then it was up to him to get his profit by disposing of the shell on the Papeete market.

Besides, he had a little commissary business: canned foods, camping necessities, tobacco, fishing line, divers' goggles and patent medicine. Any of the divers could purchase these from him at twenty per cent above Papeete retail sales prices, and this could be deducted from the credit accumulated with Rene during the diving.

There was much speculation among the divers as to what they would find in the lagoon at Scilly. I could see that René must have done some powerful talking to lure these men away from the rich lagoons up in the Tuamotus. I questioned him on some of the aspects of shell diving. Naturally he knew all the answers, but he admitted that he himself cannot dive ten feet.

That night René was eating well, for the next day he would be literally cast on a deserted atoll with his divers and their families. He told me of all the equipment he was going to land; it was all in the hold of the *Hiro*, and I began to see René in a different light. There was good organization in his enterprise, and it was backed by sensible policies. I asked him his opinion of the quality of the shell he would find in the lagoon at Scilly.

His mouth full of seagull eggs which he deftly moved to one cheek, he mumbled: "I am just as curious as you, my friend. You see, I have never been here before. If there is anything worth-while on the floor of the lagoon, my divers will get it. If there is nothing, then we have three months to repent, until Anai comes back for us with the

Hiro."

The next morning the *Hiro* was wallowing in a heavy swell as we approached Scilly. Its Polynesian name, Fenua Manua, means Land of the Birds. From the heaving decks of the *Hiro* the atoll looks forlorn in the surrounding water, and the huge breakers crashing on its coral edge seem to resent the opposition which nature placed in their way. The entire atoll is roughly egg-shaped and, comparing this oval ring in the ocean to the face of a clock, you would see four islands spread from approximately one to seven o'clock on the dial. The remaining circumference is there of course, but it is three or four feet under water. The complete ring enfolds a gigantic lagoon seven miles or so in diameter.

The sector from seven to one o'clock presents a fantastic display, common down here, that once seen can never be forgotten. It is the submerged reef with the heavy waves crashing on its windward side. Those waves which have traveled and built up strength for hundreds of miles now suddenly find their progress checked abruptly, and in their protest they shoot spray, spume and surf a hundred feet up in the air. Seen at a distance, it bears great resemblance to naval gunnery practice. First there is nothing, just horizon; then, as if by magic, a solid white wall rises out of the water and dies down again. After a few seconds the action is repeated. It is an eerie spectacle and never ceases to hold a newcomer's attention. As for myself, I never tired of looking at it, and even when miles away from these miraculous atolls I can take a hydrographic chart and look at the map maker's jagged line which marks the reef. Here and there is the insertion: "Sunken reef . . . small boat passage . . . reported awash," and once more I am gazing across a lagoon, absorbing the mysteries of the atolls.

One must see an atoll to get its feeling. It leaves a vastly different impression than a high island does. There is something about the atolls that is magnetic. They are lost and, for the greater part, deserted, full of flies and copra bugs. They are remote, a death trap in a hurricane, a danger to navigation and often inaccessible except by small boat. They offer the minimum of human comfort, their maximum asset being their copra; and yet there is something wonderful about them, and truly they belong to the list of nature's wonders. The white men who live on these pinpoints of the globe all have one thing in common which keeps them there, isolated, year after year: atoll fever, I call it. My personal analysis of atoll fever is that it is the final incurable stage of a South Sea Island Complex.

The *Hiro* made her way close to the lee side of the reef. Unlike Mopelia, there is no passage here for a vessel the size of the *Hiro*. Any entrance to the lagoon has to be made by small boat—in our case, with those tough, heavy, almost unbreakable whaleboats. The

maneuver which followed was one of the most unusual I witnessed during my long years at sea. Anai, as usual with no margin for error, approached the reef to within a hundred yards. He stopped the engine and, by occasionally reversing it, he maintained his position, notwithstanding the drift.

A whaleboat was then put into the water, and the anchor from the bow of the *Hiro* was lowered into this boat. Then the whaleboat made its way, by oar, to the reef. Timing the last few strokes was of great importance and, with not too heavy a bump, the whaleboat landed on the solid reef, which was just awash at this location. Quickly the men jumped out and secured the anchor to the reef. Then they refloated the boat, and one man paid out the line attached to the anchor, as the boat made its way back to the *Hiro*. The line was secured to the bollards on the bow of the *Hiro*, and then the schooner was riding the current which kept her away from the reef.

Anai rang off the engine, and we awaited the arrival of the whaleboats from the main island six miles down the lagoon. They would have their copra ready, knowing that the *Hiro*, would be here this day: the overseer gets his information from the Radio Tahiti shipping news which is broadcast especially for cases like this every evening at six.

While waiting, another whaleboat was lowered, and the divers got into full swing, stowing their possessions into the two boats. Close to the spot where we were attached to the reef there was a little islet. It could not have been bigger than two or three acres at the most. This was Motu Fara, the place where René Sanquer and his divers would establish their headquarters. The lagoon side of this island had a sandy, crescent-shaped beach where the water was calm. The island was uninhabited and looked it.

I went ashore in the first whaleboat. This was a new experience. Imagine a whaleboat with about fifteen people in it, loaded to about nine inches of freeboard. In addition to the human cargo there were bundles, crates, sacks, boxes, and the dismantled outriggers of two canoes.

A small outboard motor was pushing this mass through the swells toward the reef. There were two men in the stern; one handling the motor while the other had a large steering oar which he maneuvered with both hands, making up for the lack of steering power of the little outboard. They said that somewhere in that boiling water, dead ahead, was a channel deep enough to let us through into the placid lagoon. I strained to look but failed to see it. A heavy surge lifted the boat high, and we raced toward the solid coral wall as a surfboard would on a big wave. To come down anywhere other than in the center of this invisible channel would mean instant disaster. I couldn't

look at anything else but the mad water ahead of me, and I felt the lifting power of the wave slowly waning. The man at the steering oar was pulling to one side with all his strength. Boiling water surrounded us. Then, suddenly, as a complete anticlimax, the whaleboat rode gently and calmly in the channel, right where the wave had deposited her. I thought these islanders had done a superb job, but later I found out that to them it was just an everyday routine. However, they do admit that it can be tricky when the weather is really rough.

To appreciate the risk involved in this landing, one must bear in mind that the channel is only twelve feet wide, whereas the whaleboat has a beam of seven feet. These dimensions make it impossible to use oars except for steering purposes, hence the outboard motor.

We now slowly made our way in the channel across the reef. The channel is almost straight, and the few curves were easily navigated with the help of a man in the bow armed with a boat hook. The turbulent water which we left behind lost its power and blended with the sheltered lagoon water almost instantly.

We had about a mile to go in order to reach the beach of Motu Fara. Again the water was like crystal, and we had no difficulty avoiding the coral heads jutting out here and there, like sentries guarding the inner sanctum waters of this beautiful lagoon. The fish are numerous and did not seem to mind our intrusion; at least they did not scatter as they do in places where men have a habit of catching them.

There was a soft grind as we touched the beach, and I jumped ashore in two feet of water. This was the kind of deserted atoll one reads about in novels and after which Hollywood models some of its South Sea productions: nothing but beauty to catch the eye—the white beach, the palm trees, the blue sky and the still bluer lagoon. It was breathtaking.

The pattern of the formation of an atoll is the same throughout the South Seas. First there is the sandy beach on the lagoon side, then low-growing brush and coconut trees; all of this growing on aged coral which is practically black, and sand. On the other side, the same pattern, but in reverse and, instead of a lagoon, the ocean smashing on rocks and reef. The highest point above sea level was only six or seven feet, but the height of the coconut trees increased the visibility of the island from the sea by a few miles.

I detached myself from the whaleboat group and wandered around the entire shoreline of the islet. This took about half an hour, and then I crisscrossed the island. In the center I made a find: a small graveyard with a dozen graves. You could tell it was a graveyard by the way the rough chunks of coral had been laid out. There were no crosses, but at the head of each grave stood a large chunk of coral

with an inscription primitively chiseled. Weeds were growing over this little cemetery, and rotting coconut husks were strewn around in abundance. I bent down to read some of the epitaphs. They all started the same way: "*Ionei Pohe Ai . . .*" (Here died . . .) Then followed the name of the deceased and the dates. The oldest among the group was dated 1860. The most recent burial had taken place in 1923. All the names were Tahitian.

Another find on this islet was an old-fashioned water hole. It was a large oval-shaped pit dug into the coral. Rough coral steps ran down to its deepest point which was about fifteen feet. A small puddle of green, foul-looking, brackish water rested there.

I made my way back to the point of landing. Several boatloads had already been landed, and the small white stretch of beach was littered with cases, drums of gasoline, dismantled outrigger canoes, bananas, two dogs, a few baby pigs, bales and mattresses, fishing gear and kerosene stoves. To this confusion the boats kept adding things, and the divers already ashore were crawling over this heap of goods like ants. Each was looking for his own markings and, having found one, he would lug it away to the little heap where his own belongings were accumulating.

On top of this mound of gear stood René Sanquer, shouting directions in his hoarse voice, slaving away when he recognized something of his own, and generally trying to straighten out the confusion. It was a scene well worth watching. Twenty-seven people were being put ashore with all the things they would need for a three months' stay on this atoll. This included everything from a toothbrush to the complete outrigger canoe which each family had brought along. Actually, it was a miniature landing of the Pilgrims all over again—this time in Polynesia, and instead of wild turkeys running around there were huge coconut crabs.

I heard René curse as a crate he was carrying broke up and box after box of Sloan's Liniment dropped on the sand. I wondered about the presence on this remote tropical island of the familiar package of the man with the beard. René, when he had calmed down, told me that the great depths to which the divers go causes many chest colds, and they all like this patent medicine as a cure. Poor René! As he talked he gave the impression he could do with some himself, but I guess his voice was past the liniment stage.

Immediately behind the landing whaleboats small sharks, two feet in length, swam around idly; but they darted away the moment I went into the water to get a closer look at them.

The newly founded community had a break in the freshwater situation. Close by the landing stood an old copra shed with corrugated roofing which had been ducted into a water cistern. I

climbed the cement structure to look inside and found it to be three quarters full of fairly clean water. At the bottom of the cistern on the outside was a lockable faucet. René had already spotted this and padlocked it.

By noon, all the supplies had been landed and sorted, and each diver was sitting among his belongings with his wife or his *tete*, helper. During the afternoon the men cut palm fronds which the women wove. Most of them had brought a bundle of poles with them, and these were now erected in simple frameworks. All families had brought with them a few pieces of new, corrugated metal sheeting to make the roofs. This would enable each family to catch some additional rainwater for themselves. I suspected that they had not known the old water cistern was here when they left Raiatea.

By five in the afternoon the scene was highly organized. All the merchandise was off the beach, and a row of simple but comfortable shacks had sprung up in a neat line along the lagoon side. Fires were burning and women were cooking. Some men had already assembled their outrigger canoes and were fishing for dinner. By dark, a series of white gas lanterns lit up this little village, and music from guitars and ukuleles drifted across the lagoon to the decks of the *Hiro* which was still riding the swells outside the reef.

It had been a remarkable day both for the divers and myself. I wished I could stay with Rene and his men to observe the entire diving operation during their three months on Motu Fara. Everything ran so smoothly that, had a professional cameraman been able to land on this little beach at Motu Fara prior to the arrival of the first whaleboat, he would indeed have been able to shoot an original story, and in beautiful colors.

I had lunch with the divers that day: coconut crabs, fish, clams and coffee made from cistern water. Each family had packed a crate of fresh limes. The crate had, starting from the bottom up, a layer of sand, a layer of limes and so on until the top was reached. Limes could be kept in good condition for two months like this, they said. Needless to mention, the only edible things that grew on Motu Fara were coconuts.

After lunch I made the trip on one of the whaleboats to the other extremity of the lagoon, where the main settlement was. This was where the copra had to be loaded onto the boats and powered all the way back to the little pass in the reef and so to the hold of the *Hiro*. It was pleasant riding the lagoon with the wind behind to Fenua Manua, but it was a different story battling the long way back, sitting on top of a load of smelly copra and avoiding the spray which would have completely drenched the copra had this not been covered with a tarpaulin.

PHOTO SECTION II

French-Tahitian

Weaving a new roof

Paul Gaugin's grave in the Mission Cemetery

Traitor's Bay

Aka, part American and part Tuamoto

Tahitian toere player

Matavai Bay, where the *Bounty* dropped anchor

Point Venus lighthouse

By a fresh water pool

CHAPTER 12

It seems that the islanders on the various atolls try to outdo each other in the construction and layout of their little villages. Scilly was no exception, and it was a small but very charming place. Along the shore line of the lagoon stood palm-frond houses. Each house had a little "garden" of ground coral around it, set off by larger chunks of coral. The floor on the inside of the huts was truly something worth describing. It is the purest, whitest small-grain ground-coral conceivable, about the size of boiled rice, and poured on the floor to a height of five inches. It is brought in from one of the islets in the lagoon where the entire shore is made up of this beautiful product of nature. Sweeping or cleaning the floor is done simply by going over it with a bamboo rake. It is very pleasant to bare feet, and as the walls and roof are dark in color, it brightens up the entire interior.

Multicolored parakeets darted among the coconut trees, and baby sharks came quite close to the edge of the lagoon in search of refuse. There were seven workers on Fenua Manua, and five of these had their wives with them.

Ruling over this delightful little kingdom was another unforgettable character: Ottmar Jerabeck. Twenty-seven years of his life among the atolls had left their mark on this rugged individual. Ottmar is a typical product of the atolls. He had worked for Hervée's company for many years, starting as a mason and carpenter in the construction of the copra sheds; he had done a very good job and had risen to the post of *contre maître*, that is, overseer.

Of Czechoslovakian origin, Ottmar still speaks French with a decidedly foreign accent. He is an immense hulk of a man who walks with a slight forward stoop. His face, like René's, shows the wear and tear of a life of hardship among the atolls. On his head Ottmar wears a battered old felt hat, without a band; it gives him a pronounced hobo look, and he adds to this by wearing the oldest clothes he can find, all of these many times repatched. A cigarette eternally dangles loosely, Peter Lorre style, from one corner of his mouth, and he would look quite at home leaning against a dimly lighted street light in one of the shabbier districts of our cities. His appearance notwithstanding, Jerabeck is a smart individual; one realizes that after a few minutes' conversation with him. He was quite surprised at my presence on his island. I could almost read his mind: "What brings an American to this forsaken spot?"

The arrival of the judge, Monsieur Hervée and me was a suitable occasion for Ottmar to demonstrate atoll hospitality. First a young boy

was sent into the lagoon with a multipronged spear to catch some fish for the dinner which Ottmar decided to give in honor of his boss and the boss's guest. In five minutes the boy was back on shore with a handful of *iihi*, a delightful red fish, not unlike our red snapper. A woman killed a turtle which she removed from an enclosure in the lagoon where sixty or more were kept, and another woman prepared the oven for the bread. I feel this primitive but effective way of making bread merits describing:

A square hole is dug in the ground, about two by three feet. This is lined with rough, porous stones in such a way that the bottom of the hole is about ten inches lower than the surface of the ground itself. A fire of coconut husks is lighted in this cavity, and the stones are given a chance to get quite hot. Then the fire is removed with tins and shovels, and the heated area is cleaned with a wet sack. All this is done very fast, and then the loaves of dough are laid in line on this hot surface inside the pit. The pit is then covered with a lid which is the cut-off, upper part of a fifty-gallon oil drum. The top of the drum has been dented, and in this dent a small charcoal fire is kept burning. I watched and timed the process, and in twenty minutes the woman removed the cover and there were four crisp, golden brown loaves. Ottmar, I believe, had every woman in the village doing something as a contribution to the dinner he was about to serve us.

The dining room was a palm-frond shack, well built, and the floor was of that pure white coral described above. A white gas lamp hung from one of the rafters, while the dishes were set on an oilcloth-covered table. The four of us sat down and ate. Ottmar was a good host and outdid himself in this feast: stuffed sea-gull eggs, raw fish, turtle liver and turtle steaks with onion sauce, boiled rice, freshly baked bread, red table wine and the inevitable cistern-water coffee. Eating ashore was a pleasant variation after the confined, smelly dining room of the *Hiro*. The good meal was not spoiled by foul galley smells, diesel and engine-room fumes, or the less-appetizing whiffs of the washroom adjoining the dining room whose door would not lock as it should. Some of those present were relieved at the absence of the continuous motion which is the well-known trademark of the old *Hiro*.

After dinner an unusual incident occurred. One of Ottmar's workers came to the door and asked to speak to Monsieur Hervée. In his right hand was an empty brown beer bottle. In this bottle was a piece of folded paper. The man had found this sealed bottle on the beach three months before. Not being able to read English he could not read the message in the bottle.

It was a Hydrographic Bottle Message, many of which are cast adrift from ships on request of the Hydrographic Office in Washington, D. C. When these are found they are sent back to

Washington, where the combined findings of many of these messages are used in determining the currents of the oceans.

Our man had found this bottle and thought that he had stumbled upon something worth a lot of money. Consequently he had almost stopped making copra. Each worker is paid according to the weight of copra he produces, and this man saw no reason to break his back making copra when he had found a small fortune in a bottle!

After reading the message Monsieur Hervée told the man what it was all about. The man stood there, unbelieving. Then the note was handed to the judge, and he in turn tried to explain to the man the meaning of the message in the bottle. Finally it was turned over to me, and I proceeded to translate the entire note from English into French. This bottle had originated from an American vessel, the *Cape Grafton*, Captain Jones, position 148° west longitude, 15° south latitude, not too long a voyage then. It was dated March 1955 and had been picked up in Scilly in January 1956. The last words read: "There is no reward for the return of this message." Slowly the truth began to dawn on the native, and he finally let Monsieur Hervée keep the paper for sending to Washington. The next day our worker once more started making copra.

Scilly is a breeding place for turtles. Thousands of them come each year to the beaches in the lagoon to lay their eggs. A turtle will lay between eighty and one hundred and ten eggs but, although these all hatch out after forty days in the sand, only a small percentage remain alive after birth. On the way from the spot in the sand where the mother lays the eggs, to the waters of the lagoon which they immediately try to reach upon hatching, many are caught by crabs. In the water larger fish await these tasty little morsels as they try to find concealment in their new-found submarine world.

The turtle we ate weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds. I was amazed to see the woman cast the outer shell back into the lagoon after she had removed the edible parts. I questioned her and found that to the natives it is of no value at all. I walked into the lagoon and retrieved the shell, cleaned it and later varnished it. It measures four feet by almost three feet across. Back in Moorea it became a beautiful wall decoration in my island home.

We stayed at Ottmar's house for the night, sleeping on pandanus mats. The wind had risen sharply during the dinner hour, and it was not advisable to return to the *Hiro* that evening. Before falling asleep, Monsieur Hervée, the judge and I exchanged our impressions of Ottmar. It seems that while on his atoll he really produces and can work like a horse. Once every two years he goes on a vacation to Papeete and makes up for lost time. He has one glorious three-month binge, buys up the town, treats everyone with whom he comes in

contact. Then at the next sailing of the *Hiro*, Ottmar Jerabeck once more paces her deck on the way to his atoll, battered felt hat and all.

The next morning we were shown the little store operated for the use of the workers by the company which leases these islands. We would call it a co-op. During the worker's stay on the atoll he receives no hard cash at all. Everything he earns is kept on the company books. Should he want to buy a new frying pan or a few pounds of rice, he procures what he needs at the store which Ottmar keeps open for one hour a day. He pays no cash for these items, but they are debited to his account with the company.

The lack of money on the islands prevented the evils of gambling. By the same token, no liquor was allowed, and thus fights were avoided. I asked Ottmar whether there were ever any arguments or squabbles. "Not among the men," he answered, "but the women do have their little tiffs now and then."

We spent the rest of the morning inspecting the copra sheds and, while Monsieur Hervée went cursorily over the company's books, the judge and I peeked into several of the huts. We were very much impressed with their tidiness and cleanliness. The five women were happy to have a judge and, of all things, an American, as their guests. We later found out from Ottmar that normally these women wear their pareu only from the waist down, leaving their upper parts bare. But when the word got around that three strangers were arriving in the *Hiro*, they covered themselves the same as women in Papeete do.

The fair weather the *Hiro* ran into after her departure from Scilly caused all the chairs at the dinner table that night to be occupied for a change. Anai informed us that we would make Bellingshausen in good time. He was quite sure of himself, for he even said: "Bellingshausen will be on the horizon tomorrow morning at seven." I had never seen Anai use a chart or a sextant so far, and I could not resist asking him what he would do if no island appeared by eight in the morning.

"Then I'd take a sight," was the reply.

I went on and suggested that it might be cloudy with no sun visible. Everyone at the table was now listening to see how Anai would get out of that one. Anai leaned toward me, showing all his gold teeth in a smile. It was the smile of a man about to play his trump card.

"Then, *tau hoa here* [my dear friend] I would make a large circle to starboard, for I know in which direction the prevailing winds and currents might have pushed the *Hiro* during the night. I would circle slowly to the northwest where we would be bound to come upon Bellingshausen somewhere. But," he went on, as he washed down a large piece of raw fish with some pink lemonade, "don't you worry about that, Rafi. I've been doing this all my life, and Bellingshausen

has always been where I expected it to be!"

The roar of laughter from everyone at the table was tribute to the cagey way by which Anai had extricated himself from my cross-examination. Then Anai became serious and told us of a "bum" captain who had taken six days to cover the seventy-five miles between Scilly and Bellingshausen. This had happened only four or five years back. It had not been a matter of currents or heavy seas, just a lack of navigation or common sense.

The chief engineer of the *Hiro* was a huge Tahitian called Ah Eh. That was not his full name, which was so long that even among the Tahitians it was a mouthful; so they had taken the last letter of his first name and the first letter of his last name and linked the two: A-E. At one time he had been featured in a major Hollywood production. During the thirties, Murnau had made the film "Tabu" in the lagoon of Bora-Bora. Ah Eh, at that time only a youngster, had been given a minor part. Now grown up, many years after that event, he laughs heartily whenever the matter is brought up. He'll tell you about the time they had waited for days to shoot a particular scene, and then when the weather cleared up and as they were ready to shoot once more, the camera jammed. He especially enjoys telling about the fact that payment went on all the time. "Those crazy Americans ..." he reminisces.

I questioned Ah Eh about the fresh-water supply of the *Hiro*. There seemed to be no restriction on its use. The divers and their families certainly had used quite a bit of it. Water had been taken on in Papeete for the entire voyage. I had noticed that the fresh-water shower had an occupant almost constantly. Certainly the *Hiro* could not carry that much in her small tanks. Ah Eh assured me that everything was all right.

"You use the water while it is there, and then when there is no more it's finished, just like that, and he snapped his greasy fingers in the air. "Of course we always have a gallon jug or two hidden somewhere to make the coffee in the morning and the soup at night!" I realized the truth of his statements on the ninth day out when there was no more fresh water, and I even brushed my teeth in salt water.

At seven the next morning Anai's prophecy materialized, and Bellingshausen came in sight. This atoll is an almost perfect circle, and inside the lagoon are large patches of sand rising from shallow depths. I agreed the name given this atoll was not out of place: Motu One (Island of Sand), the word *One*, which means sand, being pronounced OH-NAY. The island was named after the Russian explorer, Bellingshausen. The atoll is so small that one can walk around its circumference in a little over two hours. The reef is sufficiently high and covered with growth to make a walk around the atoll possible.

Here the landing procedure was similar to that at Scilly with one exception: there is only half a pass. From above, the reef at the point of entry looks like a pie with one slice missing. The whaleboats are fitted into this wedge in the reef and loaded there. Loading can take place only in fine weather; otherwise the boats would take too much of a beating.

Immediately behind the reef, in shallow water, a few large coral heads have been joined into one solid platform by concrete; and there in an immense, neat pile, covered by a piece of canvas were thirty-three tons of copra for the *Hiro*. The platform is one of Ottmar Jerabeck's masterpieces; it is a great timesaver, for they pile their copra on it when the news is flashed from Tahiti that the *Hiro* is on her way. Sack by sack is then carried from the platform to the whaleboat on the backs of the native workers.

I jumped out of the whaleboat onto the reef and stood face to face with Leguet. As we shook hands I was instantly impressed by this unusual man. In sharp contrast to René Sanquer and Ottmar, here stood the last man you would expect to find on an atoll. My first impression was that he would fit the part of an unobtrusive dispensing pharmacist in a suburb of Paris, or a small *fonctionnaire* in some obscure government office with his nose in endless files and statistics eight hours a day, year after year. These thoughts raced through my mind as I studied Leguet's Garibaldi-type Alpine hat, his doeskin coat, horn-rimmed spectacles, pipe, khaki shorts and plastic sandals. He was short, pale and dark-haired and friendly, and he seemed glad to welcome a straying American to his island. As *contre maître* of Bellingshausen, for three months he had talked only to his seven laborers, and now the *Hiro* had brought the outside world to his door. I could detect the excitement of one who, having gone through much solitude, is once more able to carry on a conversation with an equal.

Leguet was a polished talker; his diction and manner of presentation were excellent. In fact, he was wound up like an alarm clock, and with typical Gallic exuberance and energy he waved his arms as he spoke and made excessive motions with his hands, as if to accentuate each spoken word. Altogether I was much impressed and interested. I asked myself over and over again: "Just what brings a man like Leguet down here?" One ponders over the multitude of possibilities and reasons: maybe a broken home, an unhappy love affair, a business failure or just being sick of convention and anxious for a complete change. Whatever it was in Leguet's case, he had already been here four years, and he made it plain that he was perfectly content. No wonder! As you find out after a while, men like Leguet are kings. They rule their little kingdoms, and all is theirs as far as the eye can see. For months and years at a time they don't have

to dig in their pockets for money. If you are happy with such an arrangement, then decidedly an atoll is the place for you.

More remarkable was the fact that Leguet had accepted his position in Paris and, never before having left Europe, he came directly from Paris to Papeete and then by *Hiro* to Bellingshausen. Evidently this type of living must have been on his mind for some time before he came here, for he adjusted to all the hardships which face any new arrival to the atolls

Leguet marched us past coral heads and holes in the shallow little lagoon which separated his house from the reef. While he and Monsieur Hervée caught up on business talk, I wandered around the little boarded house which was Leguet's residence.

Exceedingly simple, with a boarded floor, painted walls on which hung last year's faded PAA calendar, and corrugated roof with the inevitable water cistern linked to it, was the house of the ruler of this island. Actually it was situated on a separate little island in the small lagoon and was within wading distance of a similar island where the huts of the native workers stood.

The judge, Monsieur Hervée and I had luncheon at Leguet's. Lobster caught on the reef the night before, a salad of lettuce, radishes and green onions and even tomatoes which this amazing man had raised were placed before us. Two years ago he had talked the company into sending him a dozen barrels of black earth from Papeete. He had built an enclosure on top of the coral, formed of strong poles fitted closely together to keep out the coconut crabs. Into this enclosure he had poured the earth. He had coaxed it with endless care, irrigation and fertilization into growing such delicacies as lettuce, radishes, onions, a few tomatoes, beans and some flowers. He had also raised chickens, the eggs of which enabled him to serve a delicious homemade mayonnaise with the lobsters. These were in such great abundance that on the table he had a large oval platter of them piled one foot high.

After lunch the judge was able to perform some official duties. There had been two deaths on the island since the last time the *Hiro* had been here. The law requires a death to be reported to the authorities within twenty-four hours, but this could not be done in view of the island's isolation. Normally, the report of these deaths would have been sent to Raiatea, and there the judge would have signed the necessary papers validating the outdated death certificates. Now while right on the scene, he was able to settle the matter in a few minutes. One woman had died from an inflammatory disease and a three-year-old child had wandered away from its home and drowned in the lagoon. We visited the graves which formed a new cemetery between the coconut trees at the edge of the lagoon.

I spent the remaining part of the afternoon wandering around the little island by myself. Once the *Hiro* and the activity surrounding the loading were out of sight and hearing, I felt quite alone on the atoll. I walked on the edge of the reef, halfway around the island. It was a sad walk and put me in a pensive mood. This forlorn little atoll is like a theatrical representation of the end of civilization. There is something about its general aspect that reminds one of a dismal Dali production. It could be taken for what remained of the world after the explosion of the last A-bomb: the incongruous forms of the pieces of driftwood on the shore, the highly irregular and distorted holes in the coral, the ever-present menacing sea. Life is represented by a soaring bird who swoops down to examine the intruder, and a crab will scuttle out of the way in a hurry.

James Michener conveys this feeling masterfully in one of his atoll descriptions:

> "But there still remains this fact: when the great seas pound upon the reef, when the stars shine down upon the lagoon, there is a mysterious and fragile something that no amount of misrepresentation can destroy. To say that men have died in such places, engulfed in disillusion and despair, is merely to point out that on a lonely atoll as in most cities, good men find loveliness, weak men find evil." (*Return to Paradise* by James A. Michener)

A city is so far away and inconceivable here on this remote atoll that it might as well belong to another world, as a thing one has heard or read about.

As I returned to the inhabited part of the island and the lagoon from which the copra was being loaded into the whaleboats, I saw that the high stack on the platform had diminished to only two more boatloads. My cabin mates and I grouped around Leguet for farewell handshakes. The last whaleboat took us to the *Hiro*, and from her decks I looked back at the entire population of Bellingshausen, fourteen in all. Leguet waved his Garibaldi, and the native workers shouted "*Ia orana*" as the *Hiro* turned her stern to Bellingshausen and headed for the open sea.

In Scilly there were still ten tons of copra to be loaded, and Monsieur Hervée was anxious to see the result of René's test dives. From outside the reef we could see many improvements in René Sanquer's little village. We hurriedly launched the whaleboat and made our way through the surf to Motu Fara. On the beach stood René and some of his people. His village looked charming; coral paths linked the houses, in front of each was a canoe, and all the kerosene and gasoline supplies had been stored in a separate shed made for them. One never would have guessed that the community had been

there for only four days.

René further surprised us with the results of the preliminary diving. In two days they had collected fourteen hundred pounds of mother-of-pearl shell. It was cleaned and neatly sacked, ready for shipment to Papeete. The shell was not so large and heavy as that from the Tuamotus, but so far the men had not dived for it at maximum depths. It did certainly have a brilliant color, however, and could be sold at a good price.

I declined an offer to ride up the lagoon once more to the main village, as I preferred to stay with René and mix with the divers until the departure of the *Hiro*. I found out that they had gone down as deep as eighty feet during the first two days of diving. Divers will go as deep as one hundred and twenty-five feet and more at the height of the season, but they start with lesser depths and gradually get their system accustomed to the pressure.

CHAPTER 13

The French Government has a good method of controlling the mother-of-pearl industry in Polynesia. A lagoon is divided on the charts into four or more sections. Each year a different one of these sections is opened for diving for a certain number of weeks. When the season is closed for this particular section, the mass of divers who have worked it move to the next lagoon where another part is opened for diving. This lagoon may be hundreds of miles away from the first location. In this way, no section is touched again within a period of four years. This gives the shell time to grow, and the prosperity of any lagoon is not imperiled by a happy-go-lucky plundering. Furthermore, no aqualungs or mechanized devices are used. Several years ago these had been tried, but there was too much confusion. The natives would forget or make mistakes in the handling of the apparatus, and after some time they found it easier to go down as they had been doing for many years.

They dive for the mother-of-pearl shell, not necessarily for pearls. Naturally, every shell is examined when opened and cleaned, but it is a very small percentage that contains those priceless baubles men seek so assiduously. But before you get the impression that maybe it is not worth while diving for the shell alone, here are the facts profit-wise:

A good, unpitted mother-of-pearl shell sells for one hundred and eighty francs ($2.88) per kilo on the Papeete market. A good-sized shell, both sections of it, will weigh from two to three pounds or more. A diver can bring up an average of four shells per dive. He will dive from 35 to 120 feet in depth, and a mean stay under water is one minute and a half. Some of the younger divers exert themselves and stay down from three to three and a half minutes, but even in these parts such experts are a rarity, and the older men will not advocate such prolonged dives. Frequently a diver's revenue for the season will take care of his family's needs for the remainder of the year. Of course he is not quite idle during the nondiving periods, for he has his copra business and his fishing also to keep his budget balanced.

When the divers were preparing to go out, I obtained permission from René to go along in one of the canoes. The canoe contained the diver, Rotui, and his *tete* or helper. I became the third man in the canoe, and that seemed to give them no little pleasure. They probably never had been and never again will be able to say that they had taken an American out diving in the lagoon by Motu Fara.

I put on my big pandanus hat and swimming shorts and took my faceplate along just in case I should find the temptation too strong.

Rotui and his helper paddled with apparently no particular spot in mind. They made their way into the heart of the lagoon with easy strokes, chatting as the slim craft glided over the blue water. The other canoes were more or less following our example. Each diver and helper decided for themselves just where they would stop the canoe and start diving. When they reached a spot where the picking seemed good, the canoe was stopped and a line was let down with a basket weighted with a piece of metal. Most of our divers had an old tire rim with homemade netting woven inside it. This made a sturdy round basket which sank the moment it was thrown into the water. The basket, of course, was to be a receptacle for the shell which the diver might find on the bottom. After removing the shell he does not come up with it in his hands. His helper hauls up the basket, empties it in the canoe, and tosses it overboard again.

Rotui stopped paddling, and there was a short parlay in very fast Tahitian, after which the helper threw the basket and line into the lagoon. The canoe came to rest in sixty feet of water, and the paddles were shipped inboard. Rotui faced me and with profound earnestness written over his face he announced that this would be a good spot. To me it was no different than any other spot in the lagoon, but Rotui gave me the idea that this was definitely the best place to dive. He adjusted a knife to his belt and put on his diving goggles. Then he took a long series of deep breaths, which he let out with a sound that bordered on whistling. I soon perceived that this was not an act put on for my benefit but a regular routine. It seems that the diver gains assurance from his own belief that by letting the air out slowly, and with much sound, he retains some of the valuable oxygen which each breath supplies to the lungs. This routine has long puzzled outsiders, and invariably upon direct questioning the divers will reply, “It has always been done that way.” I believe the value of the whistling prior to diving is purely psychological.

Then there is a monotonous chant of about fifteen seconds’ duration which precedes especially the first dive of the day. It has a plaintive, minor-key charm and is eerie to listen to; the diver right next to you will be chanting when there comes a similar sound from another diver some hundred yards away. Again your curiosity is answered with, “It has always been done that way.” If one were really to make a study of this custom, one might come up with an answer dating far back into Polynesian history. It could well be the remnant of an ancient chant, a prayer to the gods for protection from the dangers to which the diver is about to expose himself.

During the full minute and a half of this preparation, Rotui was just gently treading water while hanging on to the outrigger of the canoe. Then he twisted his toes around the lead line, a few feet above

the heavy piece of lead which was attached to one end. His hands grabbed the line in front of his chest, and his helper rapidly uncoiled the line from the little platform in the canoe. Rotui disappeared in the depths of the lagoon.

Rotui's first effort lasted no longer than one minute, and he came to the surface with the news that he wished the canoe moved about fifty feet closer to the shore. The tete raised the net and paddled in the required direction, while Rotui held on to the outrigger in the water. A signal from his hand told us that this was where he wished to anchor the canoe, and the net was let down again.

Another series of whistles took place, and then Rotui dove into the depths once more. A slight tug on the line let us know that he was on the bottom. The depth was still between sixty and seventy feet. Evidently this time Rotui was not idling around looking at the scenery underwater but was picking shell, for when he came to the surface it was with a big grin, and he informed us that he had found a bed of mother-of-pearl oysters and had put no less than six into the basket.

The helper hauled up the basket and took the shells out, one by one, laying them in the bottom of the canoe. Rotui leaned on the gunwale of the canoe to watch them being opened. With one agile stroke the helper inserted the knife between the nearly soft outer rims of the oyster shell. A twist followed, and the shell was spread wide open. Quicker than can be narrated, the helper then ran his index finger with a deft little motion through the flabby flesh of the oyster. This is the search for any pearl which might have grown in the animal. As no priceless pearl dropped into the canoe, he separated the muscles from the shell, and from the muscle he removed the black meaty part which he tossed into the lagoon. He washed the remaining part, which looked like a piece of abalone, yellow and tough, by dipping it over the side into the water. He then cut this into two parts and offered me one, showing what to do with it by eating his part. I followed his example and found it quite edible, and with lemon juice it would have been very tasty.

Rotui explained to me that by law the oyster is thrown back into the lagoon at the place of diving so that the roe or eggs will settle on the rocky bottom and start growing again. It will grow only on solid material such as rock or coral. At some lagoons there is a rule established by which each diver will take a sizable chunk of coral or rock with him every time he goes to his diving area. It is a simple way to provide continuously favorable growing conditions in the lagoon bed.

The system was accidentally discovered years ago when a scientist was studying the production of mother-of-pearl. The records showed clearly that there was a remarkable increase in the harvest

during the four or five years immediately following any hurricane. This stands to reason, for innumerable chunks of coral and logs of trees, parts of buildings and debris are suddenly blown into the lagoon, thus providing the necessary bases for the young shell to grow on.

The tete went rapidly through all six shells and scraped the excessive outside growth off them. Meanwhile, Rotui was out of sight once more, and shortly the entire operation was repeated. At the rate he was going, each dive netted him about eleven dollars, and I began to see why the Government has this trade strictly controlled. If this were not done, there would be no mother-of-pearl left in French Oceania in two years' time.

It should be understood that the diver does not get one hundred and eighty francs for every kilo he brings up— rather, roughly, about fifty per cent of that.

What happens to the shell after it leaves French Oceania? Buttons, millions of buttons; some costume jewelry, but not much. As the ladies' fashions demand larger buttons, the price of the shell goes up, causing a chain reaction which eventually reaches people like Rotui. He does well when he locates a bed of oysters. But the diving business has its lean days as well as its dangers. When Rotui gets the urge to dive deeper for heavier shell, he spends days on the bottom of the lagoon, one hundred twenty feet below the surface. These days represent jeopardy of his hearing and general physical well-being—for the sake of buttons.

Then there are dangers such as sharks, man-catching clams and giant eels. Besides, he must keep his mind alert and not come to the surface too fast if he is to avoid that painful affliction known as the bends, locally called *Taravana*. He must also be on guard against the danger known as nitrogen narcosis or underwater illusions. Generally this manifests itself in the form of a magnificent bed of large pearl shell, always just a little further away than where the diver is at the moment. In an effort to make a rich haul he will strain himself and may pay for it with his life. If that happens the tete hoists a pareu on a paddle in the canoe, and faster than by coconut radio all the surrounding canoes are alerted, and the men cease diving for that day and rush to the scene of the mishap.

I asked Rotui what happens if he should find a pearl and learned that very likely it would be sold to René, the latter in turn disposing of it in Papeete. The Tahitian is not business-minded enough to hold on to his prize until it brings a good sum, so he sells it for half its worth, sometimes less. A few thousand francs at the moment may mean new bicycles for his wife and himself or a new outboard for his canoe.

Around three in the afternoon Rotui decided to return to Motu

Fara. The canoe was loaded with cleaned shell, and I could tell that Rotui was tired. Both the tete and Rotui felt they had had a good day's work and a profitable one at that. Some of the canoes had returned already; others were still out. One of them had made two trips, having had so much good luck that the men had returned to shore to get rid of the load.

After ten minutes of paddling, Rotui stopped and told me that here the depth was only fifteen feet. Would I like to dive for some shell? At that moment I liked nothing better, and in two shakes I was over the side even before the tete lowered the basket. The water was very clear, and there were coral heads on the bottom as big as railroad flat cars. I looked around at the beauty of this submarine garden and then noticed that Rotui was down by my side. He pointed to a shell perched on a large slab of coral, and I went for it. The shell stood in an almost upright position, and the two halves were not completely closed. I grabbed it with my hands and tore at it with all my strength. My air supply was running low, so I had to let the shell go and reach the surface in a hurry.

Rotui followed me, and with an empty shell balanced on the outrigger as a model he proceeded to show me how to pick an oyster.

"Never grab it as you did," he said. "Look at me."

With a steady motion his hand approached the shell from the side, and with a circular swing of the wrist he grabbed it sideways and picked it up. Rotui went on to explain the secret: the moment you touch the shell, the animal attaches itself very firmly to its resting place. This is done by means of sinews which emerge from the bottom of the shell. If you grab it with a sweeping motion there is no time for the animal to put up a defense, and the shell comes off the rock easily.

I went down once more; this time I spotted four or five of them on the other side of the coral slab. Now I put Rotui's lesson into practice and, behold, the shell came off the rock easily. Coming to the surface for air now and then, I filled up the basket in very short time. Then I got back into the canoe and the tete brought my catch to the surface. I helped him open the shell, for I had become good at this by now, having assisted him all day. Within two minutes my dreams of pearls and riches had gone up into thin air, but I did have about seven pounds of mother-of-pearl shell which Rotui insisted I keep. Then, as a consolation he offered me a few choice pieces of his own. Realizing that his feelings would be hurt if I refused, I gladly accepted these mementos of this wonderful day on a beautiful lagoon.

Back in Motu Fara, we lugged the shell to Rene's scales. The weight was carefully recorded and the quality noted in the book. Rotui hadn't done so badly: one hundred and twenty-eight kilograms at a value of two hundred and twenty-one dollars. However, some of

his shell was not first quality, so he would not receive quite this amount.

The divers laughed as I placed my seven pounds on the scale, and if I had been paid at their rate, I would have made just a little over six dollars. However, I preferred to keep my shells. They presented me with an empty basket and, left and right, these good people gave me various additional pieces of shell. They were happy that I had participated in a day of their life, and there is nothing like a happy Polynesian; he'll give you anything he owns if you let him.

For once I did not look forward to boarding the *Hiro*. I would have enjoyed staying right here on Motu Fara with René for the full three months of the diving season. But the last whaleboat from the main village came in sight and stopped at Motu Fara to pick me up as well as the fourteen hundred pounds of shell. I shook hands with each of the twenty-seven people, and René walked with me to the whaleboat.

Ia orana!

The wind had come up as I hastened back to the *Hiro*. As she blew her siren I saw Jerabeck in a bouncing whaleboat leaving the ship's side, heading for the pass. I shouted good-by to him, and he turned around and raised his battered old hat; then a large wave hid his stooped hulk as well as the entire whaleboat. The next minute they had safely reached the pass, and that was the last I saw of Ottmar Jerabeck.

Once outside the lee of the island, the *Hiro* rolled and rocked. She groaned and made noises which indicated her laboring under stress and strain. I wondered what would be her eventual end; perhaps it would be like that of so many others of her kind—on some reef. Then she would once more assume her original name and become a memory.

Her one diesel was acting up badly. It had an aluminum piston which had cracked years before and they had remedied this by welding. It and its stronger brother managed to push the old *Hiro* along at no more than seven knots. I spoke to Ah Eh about it. He completely surprised me by informing me that there were two new diesel engines on their way from Germany. They would be installed before her next trip to these islands. It seemed incredible that a ship as old and worn out as this should warrant the expense of new engines. But I found this to be another sample of the general outlook on life in Polynesia: Use and enjoy everything you have to the fullest degree possible, for when it is gone it is finished.

The vessel was now filling up with copra. Already her holds were full and the hatches battened down. The last ten tons had been

stacked on top of the hatches and wherever there was room for it. The pungent odor invaded the ship: decks, cabins, dining room. Countless little hard, black bugs hopped from one's hair onto one's arms and chest—copra bugs, harmless but abounding wherever there is copra for them to feed on.

The vessel had two supercargos and I wondered at the necessity of these on a ship the size of the *Hiro*. One was Tahitian and the other Chinese. The judge was able to give me a logical explanation for this seemingly illogical expense.

"You see, French law requires that a French or Tahitian *état major* be carried on board. By that I mean Captain, Chief Mate, Chief Engineer, Chief Steward, Supercargo and Boatswain. So this ship carried all of these, but in addition there is Awah, the Chinese supercargo. He is not signed on as crew at all but is on the passenger list as you and I are. Actually, though, he is the administrative brain of the vessel. He is the brother of the owner! In other words, the Chinese owner of the vessel complies with the law but sends his brother along just to see that things are done his way."

This made sense to me. I had often seen Awah handle decisions, and at meal hours it was he who suggested wine to the guests at the table. It was with Awah and Anai that Hervée decided the time to leave an island and whether to pick up the remaining cargo on the way back or take it all at once. Hervée paid seven hundred and fifty francs an hour from Papeete to Papeete for the charter of the *Hiro*. Naturally he wanted to get as much done while these expensive hours accumulated.

I had also noticed Awah in the ship's trading store. Most inter-island schooners in French Oceania carry a little store on board. A space the size of two cabins is usually allotted for this purpose, and it is fitted out with counter, scales and other store requirements. When the ships arrive at an isolated island to pick up copra or mother-of-pearl, the stores are opened to the islanders. The latter, having received money for the cargo just taken aboard, are able to purchase things which are usually unobtainable on their island.

In addition to operating the *Hiro*, Awah's brother had a similar store in Papeete on a larger scale. This floating extension of his land-based store tied in very well with the whole enterprise. It was Awah who handed me the bill for the cost of the voyage: three thousand francs for ten days, $48.00. Where else could you obtain such value and see so many interesting things for so little? The *Hiro* is not a vessel I would recommend to any American lady traveler, but a man who wants to break away from Papeete and really see life in the South Seas should by all means take the *Hiro*. Either she will have you flat on your back in no time, or she will make a good sailor out of you. So

widespread is her reputation for motion at sea that here is the story to end all stories about the *Hiro*.

The former owner of the *Hiro*, Lew Hirshon, decided to take a group of friends to an island six hours away from Papeete for a weekend. Among the group was an American millionaire. At sailing time a note arrived addressed to the group from Lew, announcing that he "didn't feel so well" and had decided at the last moment not to go on the trip. An hour out of Papeete, the happy excursionists wondered about the authenticity of Lew's little note. They figured out that he knew the ship and preferred a weekend on dry, firm land.

Needless to say, everyone was terribly seasick, including the millionaire. When in his cups, this man had the eccentric habit of entering a stationery store, buying a stack of picture postcards and mailing them to friends with whom he never bothered to correspond under normal circumstances. Six months after this trip, a postcard arrived in Papeete addressed as follows: "Vessel 'Hiro,' Papeete, French Oceania." It came all the way from Singapore. Eventually the card found its way to Lew Hirshon's desk, and he had reason to be surprised as he read the message: "To the 'Hiro' . . . You rocking, rolling old s.o.b. . . . Bah!" It was signed by our millionaire friend who, even in distant Singapore, could not forget the old *Hiro*.

Before leaving the "Polynesian god of thieves and sailors" (for such is the meaning of *Hiro*), I thanked Monsieur Hervée for his cooperation in making this trip possible for me. I also added that he was right in not accepting tourists to these islands. There are no facilities, and if you are not used to roughing it you would indeed be a problem. Personally, I hope that these islands never have "facilities," so that they will be kept as they are now: unspoiled, beautiful and natural. It is good to know that some of these islands will remain out of reach of a fast-moving civilization.

My final words to Monsieur Hervée surprised him: "I hope, Monsieur Hervée, that you will still be alive in 1999."

"1999! *Pourquoi*? Why do you say that?"

"Well, your company's lease for Mopelia, Scilly and Bellingshausen expires in that year, and I hope you are here to renew the lease, Monsieur Hervée." I think that the laugh which followed was the loudest and happiest one Hervée had given forth on the whole voyage.

We shook hands, and he walked across the little gangplank from the *Hiro* to the dock to disappear once more in streets lined with houses and offices, back to his desk.

As I stared after him, a shout from the upper deck brought me back to reality: "*Au revoir, Rafi Tane, Ia orana*!" A brilliant flash of gold caused by the reflection of the early morning sun on his dentures,

a friendly wave of the hand . . . Farewell, Anai!

A few days after the end of this voyage, I made my way to the little park by the waterfront in Papeete. Under my arm was a copra sack with one of the *Seeadler* shell casings. Standing by the *Seeadler* gun, I took the shell and inserted it into the breach. It fit, all right, and I was satisfied that I had the genuine article. Later, I polished the bottoms of these shells and found them to be from different factories and towns in Germany. One came from Karlshuhe, dated 1915. Two others bore the name of Dusseldorf, dated 1910 and 1912. The remaining two were from Magdeburg, 1911 and 1915.

CHAPTER 14

Although my trip to the atolls was most enjoyable and interesting, I was happy to be back in Moorea once more. Compared to the three islands I had just visited, this was indeed a paradise. Just the same, I considered myself very fortunate to have seen the three islands which the *Hiro* had visited and which few Americans ever get to see.

Upon returning to Moorea my nightly rest was disturbed by the reappearance of an old affliction. At one time in my life I had fallen and dislocated a vertebra. An able osteopath had managed to get the wayward joint in line again. I had been told to be careful in carrying or lifting anything excessively heavy. I knew that I had dislocated this again. During the daytime, with my body active and my mind busy, it did not matter so much, but at night it was a slow gnawing evil, not exactly painful, but extremely uncomfortable. I knew how I had dislocated the vertebra: carrying the relics away from the *Seeadler* that day in Mopelia.

Papeete does not have any bone specialists, osteopaths or even a chiropractor. After a week of nights spent in misery, I hit upon an idea. I had observed the technique used by the osteopath in putting the vertebra back in place. There was nothing complicated about it. It was only a matter of stretching the spinal column, in straight line, in the hope that the offending bone would go back in place with all the others when the tension was released.

I conceived the idea of stretching myself by building a contraption which would have the same effect as an osteopath's stretching table. From wood I built a stock, something similar to that used in olden days when a man was put on a public square for a day with his head sticking through a hole in a board. In the vicinity of the house was a tree with a sturdy branch running horizontally out from the trunk at a height of ten feet. To this branch I fastened the stock in a horizontal position by means of a rope.

Then I waited for nightfall and, prior to retiring, I took a sleeping pill from my medicine cabinet. I went into a deep slumber, with my alarm clock set for one o'clock in the morning. At that time I awoke feeling relaxed, half numb and at first unwilling to get out of bed. I forced myself to get up and go to the stock. For a light, there was a hurricane lantern hanging on the same branch to which the stock was attached. With my body muscles in a relaxed and pliable state, I fixed the stock around my head in such a way that it held my head at two points only, at the back of the cranium and under the chin. Standing

on an empty box, I rigged the stock at the required height above the ground, seven feet, which meant that when I stepped off the box, my feet would be just one foot off the ground. Everything was ready, and I stepped off the box and was left dangling in mid-air. I kept myself as limp as possible in an upright position, and I hung like that for a full minute. Then I pulled the box back under my feet by means of a rope which I had tied to my waist. I returned to bed, took another sleeping pill and dozed off. Next morning I awoke cured, and to this day I have not been bothered by my back.

The only other time I needed medical assistance was after I had eaten fish which had fed on poisonous coral. Here again I had to use my own resources.

In Papetoai one cannot eat the fish caught anywhere. There are certain places along the shore line where the fish is not eaten because it feeds on poisonous coral growths. When in doubt, the natives take a fish and cut it open. If the flies bother the fish, then it can be eaten, but if the flies stay away from it then you also had better stay away from it.

Not knowing this little rule of thumb, one day I broiled a delicious fish. As I had several more than I could eat, I gave some to the cat and the two dogs which the villagers had given me. Shortly after the meal, at one o'clock, I got up from the chair I was sitting in and felt dizzy. My eyes started burning, and I could not understand what was wrong. When I went to the mirror to look at myself, I was astounded to find my face redder than if I had the measles. The rest of my body was equally red; not just a rash or speckles, but a solid, deep pink. No pain anywhere except nausea when on my feet. I lay down, confused and wondering what had happened. My heart was beating a mile a minute and pounding so loudly that its audibility was terrifying. Several times I had to get up and run out of the house to vomit. Upon one of these disagreeable missions, I noticed that one of the dogs was doing the same thing and that the cat was lying on a bench in the patio panting like a steam engine.

Then I realized what had happened, for we all had eaten some of the same fish. Now that I knew what was wrong, I could start counteracting it by using the simple but effective method applied on ships during the day when I first went to sea. If any crew member had eaten canned food of questionable nature and felt bad, or if he had eaten overripe tropical fruit or bad meat, in short anything producing stomach symptoms such as mine, he was given a solution of plain charcoal and water to drink.

In the kitchen I crushed a piece of charcoal in a bowl. This I put in a glass and mixed it with water and drank it. Then I lay down once more. I did not vomit again, and within another hour my excessive

coloring had started to subside and the pounding heart resumed a normal beat. By four o'clock in the afternoon I still felt weak and my eyes were still bloodshot, but otherwise I was all right. By six I wandered around to get the circulation going, and I came upon one who had not done so well as I: one of my dogs had died.

The next day Emil came by, and I questioned him about the fish. He immediately asked me where I had caught it. When I pointed to the place, he shook his head, and with his arm he designated a quarter of a mile stretch in that particular location from which he said the fish must never be eaten. Then he told me that I should have drunk coconut milk; the Tahitians use this when they make the mistake I had made the day before. Something in the coconut milk settles the stomach and has curing power. I made a mental note of this but fortunately never had to resort to it.

My cat and dogs had done wonders in keeping the rats out of the kitchen and bedroom. Some nights a stray rat would wander in the thatching of the roof very audibly; then I'd poke a stick in the direction of the noise and it would disappear. My first few weeks, however, I caught rats in my traps every single night. Then they got wise and stayed away.

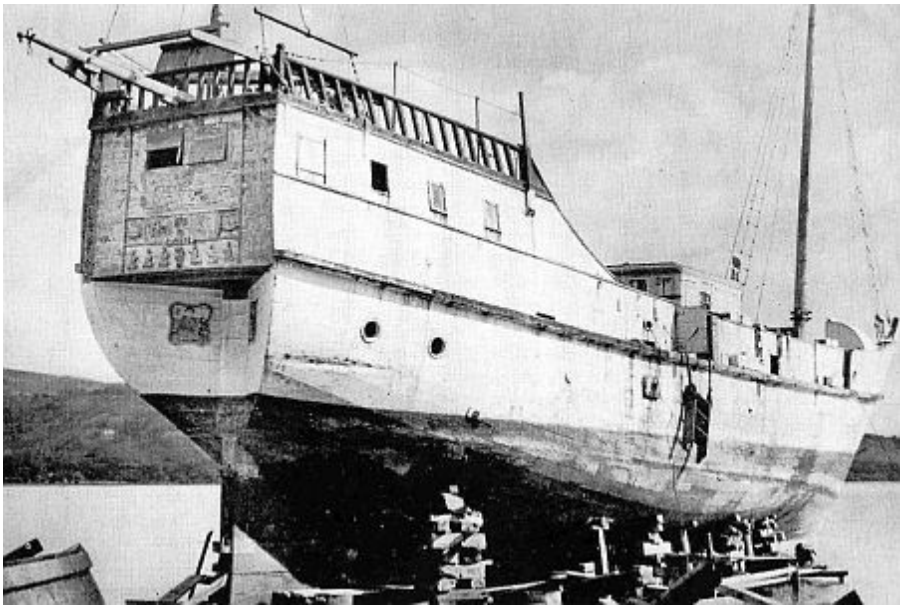
We also had numerous mynah birds. In 1906 the French Government imported these from Fiji to combat the wasps which were harming the coconut trees. The mynahs did a wonderful job on the wasps and on everything else too; there is scarcely another bird left in French Oceania because the mynahs chased out all the others. I had tried often to catch one of these to tame him, but they are smart birds. The old trick of using the box and line attached to it, perched on an angle with crumbs around and under it, did not work. The birds would come and eat the crumbs, but not one would venture under the tilted box. Then I had another idea: I rerigged one of my rat traps. I screwed two pieces of cork about three quarters of an inch high on the board upon which the released killer bar snaps when the bait is touched. After removing one of the two springs, I had a trap that would not kill a bird but would hold him until I released him from the bar which pinned him down.

I set the trap and sank it into the ground flush with the surface. Some earth was sprinkled over the metal parts to hide the contraption, and a few breadcrumbs were scattered in the vicinity. I retreated to the house and watched. Within ten minutes a flock of mynahs swooped down and made for the crumbs. One touched the baited piece of bread, and the trap sprung. Dashing to the trap, I found I had a live bird, unhurt but scared and screaming at the top of his voice. Several birds were caught in this fashion and were kept in a cage for a few weeks at a time. The birds thus fed and cared for when let loose

again would not associate with their wild brothers but stayed in the neighborhood of the house. They were not so tame that they could be caught with the hand, but they would not take off right away as the wild ones did when I approached.

PHOTO SECTION III

Meima

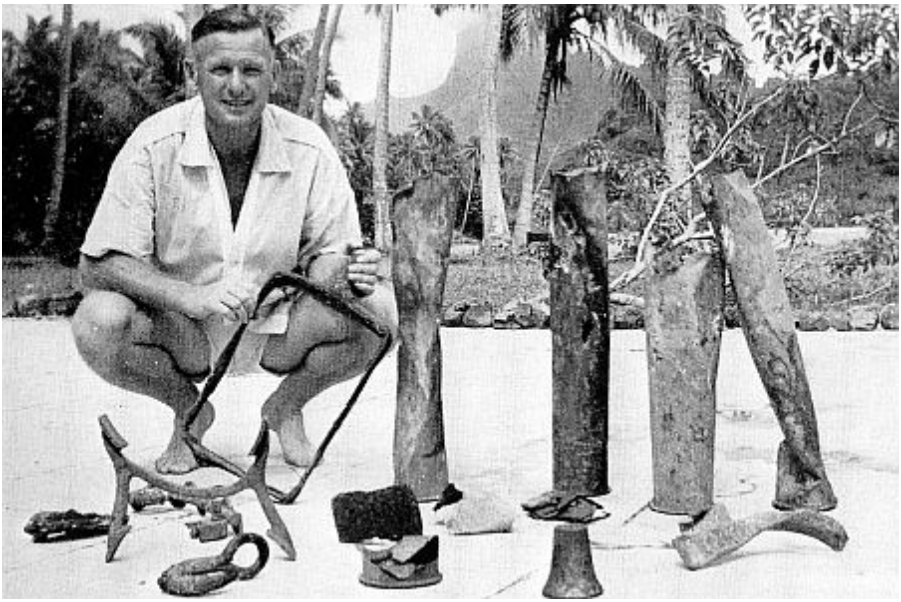


The *Cheng Ho* in dry dock

Motu Tabu, setting for the film "Tabu"

An idle moment

Typical underwater scene, from the reef



The author with trophies recovered from the *Seeadler*

Close up view of the wreckage

A generator unit from the *Seeadler*; village of Mopelia

By the lagoon

Tahitian Merrymakers

A cooling drink

CHAPTER 15

One day, while I was setting my trap, a pleasant young Tahitian arrived at my house by bicycle along the old dirt road. He introduced himself as Ben Bambridge, a field worker for the Institute for the Research and Prevention of Filariasis in Papeete.

Ben goes to the various districts and outer islands taking blood tests. Today he was covering the Papetoai district. He asked me how long I'd been here and informed me that it was just about time to submit to a blood test. For a positive reaction on such a periodic test, a recently developed drug, Notezine, is given. Thus one avoids the inflammation of glands and eventually thickening of the legs which is known as elephantiasis. Bambridge stuck a needle in my thumb and smeared the blood on a glass slide which he returned to a little black box, neatly grooved, containing numerous other slides.

The Institute in Papeete is headed by an American, Dr. John Kessel, who has done a great deal of work toward reducing elephantiasis in French Oceania. The Institute is internationally supported and in addition receives financial aid from some of the resident Americans of Papeete. A semiannual check on your blood will let them know whether the bacteria is in your system. The disease can be contracted as the result of a mosquito bite. Oddly enough, it is only the mosquito which bites in the daytime that carries this infectious virus. The Institute has discovered that many mosquitoes breed in the holes of land crabs and rats.

I have seen about a dozen serious cases of incurable elephantiasis. The natives call it *fee-fee*, pronounced fay-ay-fay-ay. There were at least five bad cases in Papetoai. I spoke regularly with these people when I saw them and, apart from a noticeable waddle in their walk, no one would ever have suspected that there was anything wrong with them. It certainly does not seem to upset them mentally or to give them any specific pain, for they are just as jolly and full of life as any nonaffected person. They laugh and are cheerful at all times. Even so, I was happy when, three weeks later, the results of my blood test proved negative.

My first encounter with an incurable case of elephantiasis was in 1955 when I landed on the island of Hiva Oa, in the Marquesas. The little village there is called Atuona and is spread out around a bay called Traitor's Bay. Upon arriving at this quiet, beautiful island, I vaguely remembered having read that this was the place where Paul Gauguin, the French painter, had spent the last years of his life. In fact, he had died here and was buried somewhere on the hill above

the beach.

I inquired about Gauguin's place of burial from the gendarme who was also the *douanier* (customs official) and postmaster general of Hiva Oa. Depending on which duty he was fulfilling, he wore the corresponding headgear! Following his directions, I climbed a rugged hill along a hairpin trail until I reached the top. The winding, narrow road ended by the side of a charming old-fashioned churchyard which looked out of place on the hilltop. Somewhere in this enclosure was Gauguin's grave.

No artist could have requested a more beautiful spot as his last resting place. There was an immediate drop to the ocean, and the volcanic black-sand beach was in sharp contrast to the whiteness of the waves breaking upon it. I was observing this picture from a palm grove where the large fronds swung lightly in the breeze, forming a perfect framework which gave added perspective to the sight beyond. Only four colors caught the eye: the blue of the ocean and the sky, the black of the crescent-shaped beach below, the white of the surf forever in motion, and the green of the palm fronds and bushes.

An imposing wrought-iron cross, fifteen feet high, dominated the entrance to the graveyard. I entered and found it abounding with high weeds and rough, short growth between the graves; one could hardly distinguish the paths. Located on the right-hand side of the entrance, with grass as high as the slab itself, was the grave of Paul Gauguin. The slab was of plain concrete, and at one end stood an upright cement headpiece, of the type so commonly seen in very old cemeteries. The epitaph was as simple as the grave; the weather-beaten lettering, painted black, was quite legible:

Ci—Gît
PAUL GAUGUIN
Artiste Francais
7 Juin 1848
8 Mai 1903

Further down one could read the signature of the group responsible for the upkeep of this grave: "*Societé des Etudes Oceaniennes.*" I gathered that this had not been the original headpiece and that this society had furnished the present one. Most of the other graves were similar to Gauguin's.

As it was noon and getting hot, I made my way back to the village, wondering at the irony of fate: such a great artist, such a forlorn, forgotten grave on a remote island. Soon I reached the only store of the village, Tissot's. In reality Tissot runs the store for the Donald Company which has a chain of similar stores throughout French Oceania.

While I was drinking a cool, bottled lemonade, the male nurse of Atuona entered the store. He was a long, thin Tahitian. His white smock which fitted him tightly made him seem even longer. I had met him on board when we entered the bay, for he is the medical representative for the island which does not have a doctor. Mareto had cleared the vessel and given us free *pratique* just as any harbor doctor would have done.

He accepted readily the lemonade I offered him and suggested that I visit his hospital. I gathered that Mareto performed every trick in the trade from childbirth up. If anything presented itself which he could not handle, then radio contact with the nearby island of Nuku Hiva brought him advice from the Government doctor there.

"And how do you like our island?" Mareto queried.

I informed him of my visit to Gauguin's grave on the hilltop, upon which he nodded politely and said, "If you are interested, I have in my hospital the daughter of Gauguin. I'll be glad to let you talk to her."

Of course I was very much interested in seeing what Gauguin's daughter was like. Having the dates of the epitaph still fresh in my mind, I was able to figure out that Gauguin's daughter could not be a young person. I accepted his invitation but told him that when one visits people in hospitals in my country one usually takes along some little gift. What would a woman, the daughter of Paul Gauguin, appreciate? Mareto had the answer: "All women like a piece of printed cloth; you cannot go wrong on that."

Looking over Tissot's store, I spotted several bolts of prints shelved between the frying pans and the canned corned beef. I picked out the most expensive one, which was only eighty cents a yard, and purchased a length of it. How Tissot gets it I do not know, but the gift was wrapped in the comic section of the *Chicago Tribune* of which there was a huge pile in the store.

Mareto led the way, and we ambled over to the hospital which was only a short distance away. It was evident to me that he occupied a position of distinction in Atuona, for everyone we encountered was very polite in greeting him.

The hospital was not unlike an old California-type bungalow, four rooms with a porch running around the building, which was made of plain wood. My guide preceded me and whisked me in and out of the rooms, nodding to his patients here and there. I had the awkward feeling that the patients were mistaking me for a visiting doctor from the ship.

Several walking and sitting cases were out on the porch, and it was to one of these that Mareto directed me after we had inspected the rooms which he showed me with great pride. Pointing to an elderly woman standing by the railing of the porch, Mareto then said:

“That woman you see over there is Tauanui Gauguin.” We walked up to her and he introduced us, explaining that I had arrived the previous day on the schooner in the bay. This was quite unnecessary; everyone in Atuona knows the moment a ship is in port, and anyone seen wandering around is immediately branded as a newcomer. I shook hands with Tauanui Gauguin. She must have been about sixty years old, quite an advanced age in these parts. One can hardly say that she resembled her famous father, and although she was half white the Polynesian strain was definitely predominant. Tauanui spoke very little French and at that time I spoke no Tahitian at all, but with Mareto’s help we managed to carry on a conversation. I conveyed to her that I had come from America and that I was an admirer of her fathers works. Now that I was in Atuona and had heard that she was here in the hospital, I had come to pay her a visit. With that I handed her the package from Tissot’s. She accepted it politely with a sideward nod of her head and smiled a toothless smile at Mareto and me. Unfolding part of the cloth she stretched it across her waist and thanked me for it.

As we were discoursing I watched her intently, trying to catch any facial or physical characteristic of Gauguin which she might have inherited, but there was none. I felt quite certain that the fact that she is the bearer of a famous name in the world of art did not mean a thing to her.

Gauguin or Koke (pronounced Kokay), as he was called by the natives, had been looked upon by most whites and probably by a good part of the native population as a crackpot when it came to art. They could not see eye to eye with him on some of his creations. Purple hair and canary-yellow skin did not meet with the natives’ approval, and his constant siding with the natives in their daily life irked the local white administration and did not make him acceptable to their society. Even so, two hours before his burial the pastor and the bishop argued about his remains: one received his soul, the other his body. The bishop, who received the latter, had Gauguin buried in the Mission cemetery, “twice hallowed ground,” as he had put it.

Before I took leave of Tauanui Gauguin, the old lady decided to sit down. As she reclined in a chair, her dress lifted somewhat, and I was appalled as I gazed upon my first case of advanced elephantiasis: incurable sores between the toes, and the legs and ankles so thick that they hardly resembled human limbs at all. Flies and insects were constantly assembling on the sores. What a twist of fate: Gauguin’s paintings worth fortunes, and his daughter slowly rotting away in the solitude of Atuona!

Upon leaving the hospital, I inquired about the location of Gauguin’s house, the one which had been burned down after his

death. At a distance of two hundred yards we stopped between the coconut trees. “Here stood Gauguin’s house,” said my guide as he pointed with his right index finger straight down. No plaque, not even a wooden board, nothing marked the place where Gauguin had suffered during his last days, where some of his great paintings had been created and ridiculed and finally burned down with the house. Chickens and baby pigs ran around in the grass where once he had immortalized on canvas, paper and wood “the gold of their bodies . . .”—his beloved natives.

Returning to the ship in deep thought, I tried to understand the general disinterest of the villagers in Gauguin, here as well as in Papeete. True, he had left Papeete under adverse circumstances more than fifty years before. Since then he had been recognized and carved himself an immortal place in art. Nevertheless, the general attitude could be summed up in one sentence: “Yes, Gauguin lived here among us, so what?”

Mareto was tramping by my side. Evidently my interest in Gauguin amused as well as puzzled him. Suddenly he took me by the arm, and we left the main dirt road and followed a narrow path in the high grass. Thinking this was a short cut back to the ship, I followed him. Soon it became apparent that Mareto was not taking me to the ship, for we stopped at the door of a small grass hut. An old man appeared. He was a Marquesan and had on a tattered red pareu and a pandanus hat. A long, rapid discussion between Mareto and the old man ensued, after which the old man pointed to a chair and made a sign for me to sit down.

Mareto sat on his haunches and faced me as he spoke: “This man is seventy-six years old and remembers Koke well. I brought you here because I thought you might like to talk to him; he speaks French.” After this prelude, Mareto introduced me to the old man who eyed me with curiosity, spat on the ground and cleared his throat loudly.

“Yes, Monsieur, I remember Koke well. We never thought he had any talent, but it appears his paintings are worth money now. I’ll never forget the day the little boy of a neighbor died. The bereaved mother asked Koke to make a last painting of her child for her. He complied with her wish and produced a painting of the dead child, his face lemon yellow and the hair a deep blue. The mother remonstrated and pushed back the painting. ‘Oh, Monsieur Gauguin, you have painted my child’s hair blue,” she sobbed. Whereupon Koke answered, ‘No, Madame, it is violet.’ ”

The old man shook his head and laughed in a faraway manner and continued: “Yes, Koke was a weird one. We never could figure him out. The day before he died he sent me to get the pastor, Vernier, to come to his aid, so great was his pain. When the pastor found that

Gauguin had a large abscess at the foot of his spinal column, he made an incision which gave Gauguin immediate relief. But he died the next day, Monsieur, and his house was burned. I believe it was Claverie, the gendarme, an old enemy of Koke, who started the fire to prevent any written evidence of his dishonest dealings with us natives to be found and sent to Papeete.

"Koke once gave me a painting, saying, 'Here is a gift for you. Keep it. Some day it will bring you a lot of money.' It was a vahine, lying on her mat in the nude, and her tane was pulling her by the hair and beating her. Tahitian Love, Koke called it. For a long time I kept the painting hidden somewhere, as my wife did not want it around the house. She said it would give me bad ideas! One day I was about to tear it up. This was after Koke had died. An Englishman who was visiting saw it and offered me ten pounds for it. What an idiot, I thought, to give me ten pounds for that horror, when I was glad to get rid of it!" The old man laughed once more, this time at himself, for he pointed at himself and said, "What a fool I was!"

Mareto had rolled himself a cigarette and was picking his nails with a penknife as the old man rattled on: "I may have been a fool, but in Papeete there is a man who was a bigger fool yet, Oscar Nordman. After Koke died, Oscar's father sent him (he was only nine years old at the time) to clean up a house in the district of Punaavia which had been rented to Gauguin by his father. Together with a sailor, the young Oscar cleaned the house and filled up three large crates with 'junk,' canvases and sculptures. They put this in a canoe and paddled into the lagoon where they dumped their load. Sure, Oscar can say that he threw away millions." I knew this story to be true, for I had talked to Oscar Nordman. Besides, it is a well-known tale in Papeete.

I thanked the old man for his time and willingness to converse with me, and Mareto and I returned to the ship. I felt my time spent with him had been so interesting that I offered him a carton of cigarettes before he left me. Waving the carton in farewell, the long, thin figure in the white smock was on his way to his hospital once more, very happy with his gift. I am sure each of us thought he had received the better of the deal.

CHAPTER 16

From my close association with the natives on Moorea, I was able to pick up a fair amount of Tahitian in a short time. Tahitian children have their entire instruction in school in the French language. No Tahitian is spoken in the classes. When they leave school in their teens they have a good knowledge of French, but unless they remain in Papeete and work for the French or establish themselves in employment requiring that language, after ten or fifteen years it becomes difficult for them even to carry on a conversation in French. Tahitians never speak French among themselves; especially on the outer islands and in the districts around Papeete, they lapse into pure Tahitian.

The Tahitian language is not too difficult for an American to learn. They say that an American learns the language much faster than a Frenchman. There are tongue twisters in Tahitian, however. As the language contains only fourteen letters of the alphabet, one can easily understand why so much emphasis is laid upon the use of vowels. A word can have as many as four of the same vowels in a row, yet there may be more than one way of pronouncing the word, with varying meanings. In order to facilitate the pronunciation of multivoweled words, a word may be cut sharply in two or even three parts between these linking vowels. It makes the language interesting to listen to, especially when two Tahitians are conversing slowly. Their language contains a large amount of word repetition, anaphora, such as *rea rea* meaning yellow, or *toe toe* meaning cold.

Actually, the Tahitian language is a dialect of the Maori tongue. Since the days of Captain Cook, white men have compiled dictionaries for Tahitian and their own languages. I believe that one of the best is the Mormon missionaries' dictionary, Tahitian-English.

Tahitian is spoken throughout the various archipelagos of French Oceania. As a rule the language is basically the same on the various islands, although certain words may mean one thing on one island and another on the next. Furthermore, the various islanders have their own dialects. There are few dialects in the world which do not drop a consonant here and there, and Tahitian is no exception. Generally speaking, the language observes the following rules:

-No word ends in a consonant.
-No word contains double consonants.

-All letters in a word are pronounced.
-The Tahitians recognize gender only where this is indicated by nature. This rule is effective for human, animals and plants.
-Arithmetically speaking, the decimal system is recognized, although they have a peculiarity of unit known as *taau*, which denotes a quantity of twenty.
-Directions—north, south, east and west—are seldom used, being replaced by:

i tai, toward the sea
i uta, toward the interior of the island
i nia, toward the wind or sunrise
i raro, away from the wind, or sunset

As I have remarked, the play of the eyes has an important part in everyday conversation. Two Tahitians can be conversing, one doing most of the talking while the other shows acknowledgment, inquiry, understanding, disgust, suspicion and various other emotions by using only his eyes.

Once every six weeks the schooner *Te Vega* would come into the bay and remain there for two days. By means of a note sent over on the *Mitiaro*, the skipper was usually able to let me know ahead of time how many guests he was bringing. Then I would go to the village and brings some girls to the house. Together we would make as many flower leis as needed. The Tahitian method is to make a lei woven onto a palm leaf, in circular fashion, so that this fits on the head, Roman emperor style. They call this by its French name: *couronne*.

As the schooner entered the pass, we would take off in the large outrigger loaded with flowers and a sample of every kind of fruit and produce which came from the skipper's land. These were stacked neatly in the bottom of the canoe and made a colorful sight: papaya, breadfruit, coconuts, avocado, star apple, bananas. Three girls went along with me in the canoe; they were in pareus and bedecked with flowers. They were always happy to do this, as all Tahitians like to visit yachts and admire the bathtubs, the modern galleys, the dining room and so forth. In addition to this, there would certainly be some cigarettes for them, and this pleased them since the price of American cigarettes is quite high in French Oceania.

In the middle of the bay we would make a wide turn with the canoe which brought us alongside the schooner. Cheers and shouts broke out from both sides; the girls climbed on board and gave everyone a *couronne* and went down the line in French tradition

shaking hands with everyone. News from Honolulu and the mainland was brought me, and there was ice-cold beer in Papetoai Bay for a change.

The passengers on the schooner are always thrilled at the beauty of the bay. Even after spending four or five days in Papeete, when they arrive in Moorea they feel that they are finally seeing what they expected to find in the South Seas. Naturally many questions were asked. They looked upon me as a modern Robinson Crusoe and wanted to hear all the details of my daily existence.

The ship was tied up stern-wise to the coconut trees and anchored by the bow. Now, canoes from all directions made their way to the schooner, filled with curious natives. I knew them all and invited a troupe of them on board to see the ship. Not to be forgotten is the sight of a Tahitian standing in a luxurious, carpeted bathroom with, of all things, a sunken bathtub. Their eyes pop as they sigh, "*Auwe!*"

Taking them into the walk-in freezer is always good for a laugh. They never experienced anything so cold in their lives. The air conditioning in each cabin is also a lively topic of conversation among them and, surprisingly enough, they love to listen to tape recordings of Hawaiian music which plays over the entire ship on a public address system.

In the evening a large fire is lighted ashore, and all passengers and guests attend an immense picnic which soon is joined by Tahitians who come out of the bushes with their guitars and ukeleles. Huge charcoal steaks are broiled and served to all. These are American steaks and cannot be found anywhere in Oceania. Wine and beer are served, and the Tahitians catch on to the spirit right away; their songs and dances can be heard across the bay far into the late hours.

I was always glad to see the schooner arrive, but I was happier to see her leave. Usually she would land thirty people or more for those two days in the bay, and the peace and quiet were completely gone. Even the nights seemed different. There was always light from the ship and the noise of her generators disturbed the stillness. The schooner always left me odds and ends which I could put to good use. Generally the bo'sun cleaned out his locker on the way to Moorea, and I was given all kinds of junk, very usable to me but of no value to them any longer. The engine room of the schooner with its work bench, lathe and electric drills was a floating toolshop to me. Anything that I couldn't do by myself, mechanically speaking, could be done when the schooner was in port, such as removing a sleeve of an old plumbing line or drilling a hole in a piece of metal. My tools could be sharpened, and there was enough gas to fill up my five-gallon reservoir which supplied my outboard. The *Te Vega* was also a

floating supermarket: I always managed to obtain a few scarce items such as jars of mayonnaise, crackers, salad dressings and some of the better canned foods.

My bread order with Lai Sang would increase from a single loaf to sixty or more, for the crew and passengers preferred the good, fresh French bread to their own ship-made loaves.

With all the attractions which the *Te Vega* would bring temporarily to my front door, I never would have missed her had she not made the call.

One day I planned to add a wing to the existing house. A consultation with Siki took place, and we decided to lengthen the center section outward, to double the size of the patio. Once more the husband-and-wife team showed up daily in their canoe. The new wing was a great success, and some old lumber I had found was used to build a small bar in one corner. It was appropriately called "The Little Beachcomber." I am a very light drinker, but wherever I settle I enjoy building a bar. Mine was the only one on the island of Moorea.

From time to time a nightmarish thought would enter my mind: How would I be able to readjust to a normal life in my own country? The mere thought of suits, collars and ties, shirts and shoes made me recoil. Regular working hours, traffic, watching the clock umpteen times a day instead of the reef; cities with not a green twig for miles, expenses at every turn; these things worried me, and I tried not to think of them. Yet I knew well that the inevitable must happen one day.

You arrive in French Oceania with a three months' tourist visa for which you paid four and a half dollars in a French consular office. As the third month expires, you apply locally in Papeete for an extension. This is done by means of a personal letter to the Governor. If you have behaved during your first three months, automatically you will be allowed to stay another five months. After that, perhaps you can wangle another month or so by having to wait for passage back either by plane or by ship, but sooner or later the hatchet will fall and, with flowers on your head and a tear in your eye, you will look back at Papeete as you go through the pass for the last time.

You can of course go back to Honolulu, or the American mainland, and start the whole cycle over again. A foreigner cannot obtain a working permit in French Oceania, at least not without extreme difficulty. You can be self-employed by writing or painting, but you cannot be employed by another or go in business for yourself. This would require an immigrant visa which involves red tape and time. But many other countries have similar regulations.

Just imagine what confusion would result if anyone could walk in and settle in French Oceania! The natives would be taken advantage

of in no time, and the face of French Oceania would change. At the moment the law still requires that before being admitted into the country you must show your means of leaving, either your return ticket by steamer or plane, or a deposit of two hundred and seventy-five dollars with the French Government.

You cannot buy land in French Oceania from a Tahitian. Purchase of land is possible only when this is offered for sale by another foreigner who happened to get his before the rules became strict. Even then, the sale must have the Government's sanction.

What would happen if this were not so? Any Tahitian with a few acres of land, and most of them have that, in lean times would sell part of it to the first buyer with a thousand dollars or for whatever money he needed. He would do this if he fancied a new motorcycle or a new kerosene refrigerator, anything he might want badly enough. Then after a few years of this uncontrolled sale of real estate, the Tahitians would be without land, homes would have to be rented, and the country would fill up with undesirable characters.

I had heard a lot about the "difficult" French officials in Oceania. During my administrative connections (before residing in Moorea) on behalf of Darr Lines, I had always found them to be extremely polite, co-operative and helpful. I have met these people in their official capacities as well as socially. The really "difficult" ones have usually been found in the one-sided stories of "difficult" tourists. Yachtsmen, I hate to say, make up a large portion of this group. Frequently they overlook the need for permission to go to such and such an island, or they approach the Chinese and trade their dollars on the black market. The official rate of exchange is sixty-three francs to the dollar. Dollars are hard to obtain for any local people who would use them to buy U.S. goods. The Chinese stores offer more than the Banque d'Indo Chine, which is the presiding bank in Papeete. Money can be exchanged only in certain places: the bank, one or two hotels and three or four stores and bars. Any transaction outside of these is strictly illegal. The land has laws, and visitors and tourists are expected to follow them.

I can go down the line from Governor Toby and not find a difficult official in the entire group: the Secrétaire Géneral, the chief of police, the chief of customs, the harbor master, and even the two boarding officers with whom I have had personal dealings.

I know one yachtsman who stayed in Papeete for six months. During that time he lived well, spent money ashore; but after being checked up on at the end of six months, he could not produce a single money exchange slip which accompanies a legal transaction. Is there any doubt how he obtained his francs? He was asked to leave. He came back to America deriding the unfair treatment he had been

given by “difficult” officials.

Visiting Americans have frequently been heard to say: “If only this were an American colony . . .”

I am dead against that. Imagine Tahiti a U.S. territory! High-pressure business, modern ideas of increasing the copra, vanilla and mother-of-pearl production would result. There would be an influx of modern transportation, inter-island planes and up-to-date surface craft. Papeete would be invaded by architects and mainland firms, seeking to build large-scale tourist hotels. Taxation would inevitably follow, and branches of the armed forces would be stationed in the new territory.

One by one the copra schooners would disappear to be replaced by modern inter-island vessels and helicopters. Gawky, sun-glassed tourists would invade the quiet countryside. The natives certainly would become more money-wise and eventually change into a hardened tribe in their effort to get more money, just like some of their white brethren. Soon the exotic, lazy charm of Tahiti and her sister islands would make way for a stepped-up civilization. Characteristics which inspired Stevenson, Loti, Gauguin and many others would vanish. Therefore I say, may the French long keep Oceania! I may be exaggerating but the risk is not worth taking.

CHAPTER 17

One day, as I sat on my patio, musing and looking at the reef, I saw a black speck beyond the breakers. I picked up my binoculars and focused on it. It was a small sailing boat, heading for the pass. It looked like a weekend type of sailing craft, more or less like our PC or S-class boats. It made its way through the pass under sail; I could tell now that there was no power being used. Once inside the pass, more details became visible. It was a blue boat with an old gray sail, and a white man in a huge pandanus hat was at the tiller. The boat flew a small French courtesy flag from her only mast, and at her back stay was the British flag. I walked down to the beach to get a better view.

The boat was now approaching, and the man at the tiller had seen me. Fifty feet away he let go the tiller and in two steps was at the halyard by the mast. He uncleated this, and the sail came down. He was very fast and almost had the sail furled and lashed to the boom as it descended. Then he went to the bow and picked up the anchor which lay on the deck. The boat was still in motion, heading my way. I knew that bottom, and when I thought the boat was in water shallow enough to drop anchor I waved my arms and shouted, to let him know it was O.K. to anchor there. The man dropped the anchor and double-checked the other end of his anchor line. This whole operation took less than two minutes: he certainly knew his boat. Then he cupped his hands and facing me, he hailed: "I say, are you Ralph Varady?" He had a very British accent. I replied, whereupon he called back, "I'm Mike Bailes, home port Plymouth, England, ship *Jellicle*. May I come ashore?"

I asked him to wait while I pushed my dinghy into the water and rowed out to him. Mike Bailes was certainly an unusual one. In a twenty-three-foot boat he had left England nine months before. With no engine and by sail alone, he had crossed the Atlantic, rested in Curasao, D.W.I., and then gone to Panama. From there he made the Galapagos Islands and, after forty more days at sea, landed in the Marquesas. From Taio Hae in the Marquesas he had come down to Papeete. There the waterfront gossip had reached him: "Go to Morea, see Ralph, his house is in the bay on the left-hand side. He will give you water." And who wouldn't help a man who had made a single-handed journey such as this?

The *Jellicle* carried twenty-eight gallons of water in five-gallon cans and had no engine; she was sloop-rigged. The lack of engine was Bailes' own idea, for he is a lieutenant commander in Her Majesty's Navy, an engineering officer. He was on his way around the world and

wanted to get away from engines for a while. This trip was being made during a leave of absence because it was something he had always wanted to do. Mike had been lucky, for he had not had one single day of bad weather all the way from England.

This boat was like those one encounters sailing in the harbor of Papeete on weekends. In sharp contrast to the larger yachts making trans-Pacific crossings, Mike did not have a thing on deck, such as crates, drums, and spare gear. Topsides, the *Jellicle* was clean as a whistle. Mike had a form of power, though. Old hands call it Norwegian steam. Hidden in the cabin and running from the bow of this tiny boat to her cockpit were two large oars. If power were needed to enter a harbor when there was no wind, or in an emergency, Mike could take his oars, fit them in oarlocks in the cockpit, and row. The *Jellicle* was light enough to be rowed quite easily.

I did the sensible thing for entertaining an Englishman-made Mike a pot of tea. He then freshened up, borrowed my bicycle and went off to see Moorea. My guest stayed in Papetoai Bay for about a week. He loved bananas, and there were plenty of these in Moorea. When he left he had no less than three bunches on his little deck.

The islanders were fascinated with Mike and his small boat. He was wined and dined in many a grass shack. He entertained the kids of the village by taking them for a sail up and down the bay in the *Jellicle*.

Australia was to be Mike's next stop after laying over in Papeete and Moorea, and as the *Jellicle* once more made her way through the pass, the old poem came back to me:

Ships that pass in the night
And wink at each other in passing
Just a friendly hail, a friendly light
And then, darkness again . . .

I watched Lieutenant Commander Bailes through my binoculars until he was safely out at sea.

Eric de Bisschop is another remarkable wanderer. In 1932 he and another Frenchman arrived in the Hawaiian Islands on a Chinese junk, the *Fu Po*. In Honolulu, they built a catamaran which they sailed from Honolulu to the French Riviera. The voyage took them two years, and their longest period at sea was one hundred seventeen days without sighting land. Next, de Bisschop skippered the well-known Hong Kong junk *Cheng Ho* from Honolulu down to Papeete. He later built a bamboo raft with which he hoped to drift to Peru in the fall of 1956. I visited him at the naval boat yard in Papeete where he had been given a place to build his raft. The bamboo sticks were tied together with

coconut fiber rope. He was not planning to take the *Tahiti Nui*, as his raft was called, to Peru for the purpose of counterproving the *Kon Tiki* theory of Thor Heyerdahl, but he merely wanted to show that the reverse process of immigration could have taken place in 500 A.D. The *Tahiti Nui* was to carry Eric de Bisschop and four crew members.

I got to know Eric de Bisschop well while in Tahiti. Previously I had worked with Jean Tatibouet, the Frenchman who had arrived in Honolulu from Formosa with de Bisschop on the junk. Their two-year voyage on the catamaran from Hawaii to France had estranged them. The final months of the venture had been spent with each in his own section of the boat, talking only when the handling of the boat made it necessary. After the trip, each man produced a book, de Bisschop calling his *Kai Mi Loa*, the name of the catamaran; whereas Tatibouet called his book, *The Confessions of Tatibouet*. Thereafter both men settled in Honolulu. They lived there for seven years, but one did not exist for the other—another extreme case of cabin fever.

De Bisschop's voyage was not a success. Unfortunately, eight hundred miles off the Chilean coast the *Tahiti Nui* foundered. De Bisschop was saved. But an interesting incident took place two weeks before the raft sank. Radio contact was established between a Honolulu ham operator and the raft. Mrs. de Bisschop, who lives in Hawaii, was given a message through this operator. "Tell my wife I will meet her in Chile when we arrive there, and give her my best wishes." Thus rang de Bisschop's message across the waves. The next day, once more radio contact was established. Part of the message received on that day in Honolulu was as astonishing as it was unexpected; once more, a few lines to his wife, and de Bisschop then remarked, "If you see Tatibouet, please give him my regards. Tell him this is like old times again."

Remarkable, was it not, that after twenty-one years of silence, de Bisschop while drifting on his raft miles away from everywhere should have thought once more companionably of his former shipmate? He had the time then really to mull over in his mind the things he had done, the things he wanted to do, and saw the past in a different light. The magic of the seas was at work, perhaps.

I encountered Tatibouet the day after de Bisschop's message reached him. He said, "I most certainly wish de Bisschop all the luck, and I know that if anyone can do it, de Bisschop can. The success of the voyage on the *Kai Mi Loa* was largely due to de Bisschop's ability as a navigator."

CHAPTER 18

While I was walking down one of Papeete's main streets one day, M. Henri Jacquier, the pharmacist of Papeete as well as director of the local museum, hailed me. We were old friends and usually met at the Cercle in the afternoon. I went into his office with him. He said, "I have something here which I think might interest you."

It appeared that every fifty years the local Bureau of Archives has a general clean-up of their files. That day Jacquier had come across a more than fifty-year-old document entitled, "La Succession de Paul Gauguin." It was the disposition of the goods of the estate of Paul Gauguin. In Jacquier's office I opened the old file. It contained slightly yellowed writing paper. The first page was divided into two columns and it was dated Atuona, 1903. It was from the gendarme, Claverie, and was to the effect that he, the gendarme, was hereby notifying the administration in Papeete that the Frenchman, by name Paul Gauguin, painter by profession, had died. As there was a considerable inventory in the latter's house, the gendarme hereby requested instructions on their disposition, since no immediate heir had appeared. This was all written in typical French longhand. On the other side of this divided paper was the answer from the government, ordering Claverie to take a complete inventory, catalogue it by number, quantity, approximate value, and dispose by public auction of some of the large things or some of the articles which people in Atuona might desire to purchase. He was also informed that articles not sold or not disposed of would have to be packed and sent down by sailing schooner to Papeete where a similar auction would take place.

Needless to say, articles first sold were things like tobacco, canned foods and household items from Gauguin's house. The next page was a complete list of the contents of Gauguin's home. Included were such things as sculptured canes, paintings, as well as coffeepots and dishes, beds, mattresses, couches, bric-a-brac, the everyday things a man accumulates. Gauguin had quite a collection of various Oriental and continental objets d'art. These were all painstakingly numbered and described in the inventory. Then came a page with the disposition and the price obtained at auction. The next page listed goods being shipped to Papeete, which, oddly enough, included all Gauguin's paintings and art work, sculpture, etc. Most of the articles to be disposed of in Papeete were the smaller household gadgets. Then came the list showing just who had bought what. It is ironic to read on this list that the people who were the brain trusts of Papeete in that period (1903) should have spent five, six, eight and ten francs for

things such as a set of six dishes, a coffeepot, a coffee grinder, or a bucket, domestic utensils; whereas some of Gauguin's paintings went begging for two and two and a half francs. His palette went for one franc. Beautifully sculptured canes went for five francs. Most of his paintings were purchased by two lieutenants of the French naval base stationed in Papeete at that time. They were amateur artists and picked up about ninety per cent of Gauguin's works on hand at the time of his death.

I read and reread these documents and asked M. Jacquier what he was going to do with them.

Jacquier replied, "The Bureau of Archives threw them my way because they thought that, as director of the local museum, I might be interested in exhibiting them in the museum. So, as I just received them and have not yet been to the museum, I thought I would show them to you as you came walking down the street."

It is amazing how often in my wanderings in and around Papeete and the Islands I have crossed Gauguin's trail, but then Gauguin is not the only one. In a place like Papeete, one cannot help but cross the trails of yesterday's and today's adventurers, writers, painters, globe-trotters. I met a young man, Charles Adams, the great-great-great-great grandson of the Adams who was the last of the *Bounty* mutineers and who died on Pitcairn Island in 1825. I also met one of the Christian descendants—Fletcher. There is a Christian living on the island of Raiatea, next door to Tahiti.

One crosses the paths of such interesting characters as Robert D. Frisbie, Captain Vigo Rasmussen, James Hall, Pierre Loti—and Alain Gerbault, the tragic, lonesome Frenchman who singlehandedly went around the world on his boat, the *Firecrest*. He fell so madly in love with Bora-Bora that in his will he requested burial in Bora-Bora—all the way from Timor, D.E.I., where he was found dead one day aboard the *Firecrest*. A box containing some of his bones was shipped to Bora-Bora, but of course the burial itself was a tragic farce.

Since he had been a public figure in France and the Colonies, a French gunboat carried his remains to Bora-Bora. Newspapermen and motion picture representatives were on hand to witness the burial of the French hero. From the gunboat the remains were carried to the little plateau at the edge of the lagoon, where the grave had been prepared. Midway between the gunboat and the grave it started to rain. "Back, back," shouted the press-movie operators. "We cannot film in this rain. No light. Take him back." The native visitors, assembled to witness the burial, were astonished to see the cortege return to the gunboat. The next day the same thing happened: when practically at the edge of the grave, the cortege returned, since the weather was unfavorable for a film to show the rest of the world the

burial of Alain Gerbault. Disgusted, the natives wandered to their huts. The third day, in fine sunny weather, Gerbault was finally buried with but a handful of people as witnesses. The natives did not show up.

Probably one of the most famous of the great whose path one crosses in Polynesia is Captain Cook. In 1769 Captain Cook was sent to Tahiti to observe the transit of Venus across the solar disc. He established his headquarters on a point not far from Papeete, now known as Point Venus.

Passage of one heavenly body or of its shadow over the disc of a larger one, such as the passage of the smaller planets Mercury and Venus over the sun's disc, affords the best means of determining the sun's parallax and, consequently, the dimensions of the planetary system. These transits occur rarely, the intervening periods being 8, 122, 8 and 105 years, so that the transit years, reckoning from, for instance, 1874, are 1882, 2004, 2012, 2117, etc. The transit of Mercury is by comparison more frequent, the intervals being 18 or 7 years. So, you see, it would have been 122 years before another observation could have been made. Cook placed a stone exactly where the observation was taken and chiseled a line on it. Unfortunately, during a hurricane, I believe that of 1903, the Point was severely damaged by action of the ocean, and the stone disappeared. However, Point Venus is still amply marked with evidence of Cook's activities there. The local Visitors' Bureau has put up a little grass shack with pictures of the great discoverer and of the *Endeavour*, his vessel, as well as engravings of the stockade which he had to build around his headquarters to prevent attack from the natives, who at that time were still quite hostile. The lighthouse first seen on the Tahiti landscape stands right on the point and bears the name Point Venus Light.

I have had the pleasure of spending many a pleasant hour in the late James Norman Hall's residence. Sarah Hall, commonly known by her friends as Lala, is a wonderful hostess. During my stay in Papeete we became very good friends. It is a unique and very delightful experience to browse in Hall's library in his home by the beach in the district of Arue. There are entire walls lined with books—books on ancient maritime history, textbooks of the ancient marine law courts, minutes of proceedings of many a maritime case; books on nature, and especially on the sea. Hall's love for the sea is particularly noticeable when one browses through his volumes. Lala has left this library as it was on the day of his death.

James Norman Hall lies buried in an incredibly lovely spot on top of a steep hill immediately behind his home. It is backed by a grove of ironwoods and overlooks Matavae Bay, that wide, magnificent bay

where the Bounty anchored in fifteen fathoms of water. It had been Hall's wish that his remains should be interred in this spot so hallowed with the memories of his and Charles Nordhoff's masterpiece, *Mutiny on the Bounty*. I don't think it is too farfetched to say that in the future many a pilgrim may visit the hill which is known by the Tahitians as *Ferae*. It belongs to the Hall family and undoubtedly will remain in their possession.

It is not presumptuous to say that Hall was the best-loved Popaa on the island. His interment is remembered by all who were on the island on July 7, 1951. His grave is only recognizable as such by the little plaque secured to a rock in front of a more or less perpendicular site on the hill: "Look to the eastward, stranger; look to the west. Have thine eyes ever seen a fairer site?" You look to the east, then your eyes scan the west, and silently you admit that Hall was right. It is an unforgettable view.

The Gauguin story has been responsible for, and been helpful to many of the present-day artists who frequent Papeete. It was a lesson indeed not to be forgotten that three years after Gauguin's death every art dealer in Europe and indeed, America, who could afford the time and the ticket for a voyage to Papeete came down, went to flop houses, mansions, and the various places were Gauguin had lived and walked, looking for any odd place where Gauguin might have painted. Today, a decent artist in Papeete has a good chance. People remember what happened to Gauguin and are a little more willing than they would otherwise be, perhaps, to invest in some at-present-unknown artist's work.

There is an old Dutchman called Gouwe who has lived twenty-seven years in French Oceania. In his own country, his native Holland, he painted nothing but horses—horses running, horses at pasture, horses lying down, horses at play —but he could not find a market for his work. He migrated to Polynesia and, as many critics have said, he and Gauguin both migrated to Polynesia because their art was not recognized in their own countries. Here the comparison ends, for Gouwe's natives are heavy and lack the inspiration of a Gauguin. Notwithstanding, Gouwe, at this time in his early eighties, sells anything he paints and at his own price! Once a year he holds an exhibition in an empty classroom of the Chinese school in Papeete. From the Governor on down, everybody attends and within two days every painting is tagged. After World War II Gouwe held such an exhibition as a benefit for the rebuilding of demolished Rotterdam. This astounding painter was able to send close to $8,000 to the City Fathers of Rotterdam.

Another unusual character was Mr. Allister McDonald. At one time one of England's great illustrators, Mr. McDonald lived on the

island of Moorea on Pao Pao Bay. I became well acquainted with him. He was ninety-six years old when I knew him, and he painted in water color every day without the help of glasses. In 1913 he held an exhibition in the Guild Hall Art Gallery in London. His ancient abbey paintings, quaint old London street corners, British countryside etchings were greatly in demand and known far and wide. Thirty years ago he came to Moorea, fell in love with the place and remained. His architectural paintings made way for waving palm fronds and blue lagoons, native faces, etc. He had a white goatee and wore an old British Indian mess jacket over a dirty old shirt, and a pareu over his pajamas which he wore day and night. Visitors looked through his paintings which he kept in an old cardboard box. Though not quite so good as those he had done in his younger days, they were still a true picture of local atmosphere. He had also done many illustrations for the Nordoff and Hall books.

I visited McDonald once and, having money with me, I decided to buy some of his paintings. Every time I picked up a painting and said, "Mr. McDonald, how much do you want for this one?" he looked at me distrustfully, and then in a hollow voice said, "Oh, that one? That one will be three hundred francs." Three hundred francs, may I remind you, is $4.80. And he looked at me as if I didn't have a dime and couldn't possibly afford one of his paintings. I bought seven or eight of them.

Allister McDonald died in August, 1956. He had fallen and dislocated a broken hip. Complications set in and at his age he had not the strength to overcome his injury. Barely a year after his death, his 300- and 400-franc paintings were worth ten times that if they were for sale at all, but most people who own a McDonald will not part with it.

The black-velvet school of painters also came into prominence in the last few years. The legendary Leeteg who lived on Moorea was the influence. At one time he peddled his paintings in Honolulu for $5, $7, $10 or $20. A good promotional idea and a good outlet for his paintings in Honolulu enabled him to build up quite a reputation. Furthermore, the life that he led in Papeete and Moorea, sometimes purposely with the idea of perpetuating the legend about himself, helped him to become known far from the scene of his painting. Since Leeteg's death, black-velvet painters are finding people more receptive to their form of art.

Bouvier, the Frenchman, formerly a Paris engraver, after twenty years in Tahiti has suddenly picked up black-velvet painting. He is finding a good outlet for his art among the visiting Americans on the lookout for a second Leeteg. Like Gouwe, he disposes of everything he creates.

On mail days in Papeete one can see almost anybody one does not see normally in town, loitering outside the post office while the twenty odd bags of mail are sorted for distribution to the boxes. Bengt Danielsson, the anthropologist, who came on the *Kon Tiki*, frequently makes his appearance in Papeete. He is visible from a great distance due to his long beard and almost bald head. This friendly and very scholarly man has made many friends in Papeete. It was my good fortune to have many conversations with him, and his recent books on the island of Raroia, where the *Kon Tiki* was stranded, are to be highly recommended to those interested in the South Seas. It was interesting to watch Danielsson kiss de Bisschop good-by the day the latter left on the *Tahiti Nui* for Chile. It was a contrast between the one who had made the voyage, and the one who was about to do so.

CHAPTER 19

One of the most unusual island groups of the world is that part of French Oceania known as the Tuamotu Archipelago, which literally means the Low or Dangerous Islands. This large group of atolls, seventy-eight in all, supports a total of 4500 inhabitants. Of this population, 2500 live on the three major islands, Takaroa, Rangiroa and Anaa. The remaining two thousand souls are spread among the seventy-five remaining islands. You can see how thin this population becomes as the smaller islands are reached. For a living these people do the usual: copra raising and mother-of-pearl diving in open season, and this leaves them ample time to look at the surrounding Pacific.

The Tuamotus are northeast of Tahiti and occupy an area roughly nine hundred miles long by four hundred miles wide. It took a number of international discoverers and two hundred fifty years to locate, chart, name and possess them. Dutch, French, British, Spanish, Russian and American navigators maneuvered their wooden ships in and out of this maze, which is a veritable insurance company's nightmare. Many of these early adventurers were shipwrecked in the Tuamotus, and the earliest records show that the first white man to lose his vessel in these parts was the Dutch explorer, Jakob Roggeveen. The loss of his *African Galley* on the island of Takapoto resulted in the Polynesians becoming acquainted with metal for the first time. The iron fastenings of this ship were an introduction to the use of metal in this part of the world.

The heavy early losses of shipping in the Tuamotus must be attributed to a general lack of knowledge of the existence of these islands and the physical characteristics which prevented them from being identified until too late, as well as the treacherous currents between the islands. Even today, up-to-date charts of this island group are scarce, and sailing directions in regard to them are full of instructions such as:

> ". . . a white painted pole with a can attached to it, in a cairn of coral, bearing 270°, marks the entrance to the pass . . ." or
>
> "There is a beacon on Tikahau but the occasional navigator should not depend entirely on it."

It must be understood that from the deck of a ship you can be looking at the horizon and not observe a thing. Half an hour later you return from below decks and, behold, there is an island. The ancient

navigators quite often “discovered” an island that had already been discovered by someone else, but reports and positions had not yet been published, as these voyages frequently took two to three years to complete. It so happened then that an island might have an English name as well as a Dutch and a Russian name. Eventually, toward the middle of the nineteenth century, two hundred odd years since the arrival of the *African Galley*, most islands reverted to their Polynesian names which in general adorn present-day charts.

The names are lovely: Raraka, Pukapuka, Takaroa, Takapoto, Manihi, Rangiroa, Napuka, Tepoto, Vahitahi, Akiaki, Hao, Marokau, Ravahere, Reitoru, Anaa, Tauere, Tekokoto, Marutea, Motutunga, Apatiki, Toau, Kaukura, Aurutua, Makemo, Tahanea, Nengonengo, Tematangi, Tureia, Haraiki, Hikueru, Tikei, Tikahau, Amanu, Angatau, Takume, Tahane, Raroia, Nihiru, Katiu, Faaite, Fakarava, Niau, Matahiva, Fakahina, Reao, Nukutipipi, Taenga, Pukarua, Pinaki, Nukutavake, Vairaatea, Vanavana, Maruroa, Tenuranga, Matureivavao, Teku, Ahii, Aratika, Tuanake, Hiti, Hereheretue, Tioka, Oura, Makatea, Manuhangi, Maria, Rekareka, etc. (*Note*: Seven of the seventy-eight islands are part of larger islands and are not individually named.)

For a long time I had speculated about these islands, gathered data on them, and finally one day I actually embarked on a wooden ship, a twentieth-century man following the trail of his forebears. I was assigned one of the four bunks which lined the port side of the schooner *Vaitere's* dining salon. My only privacy was a thin curtain which had shrunk considerably or else had been made too small.

My roommates were as varied as they were interesting: a newly wed couple on their way to Takaroa, a pregnant woman, and two young missionaries. The latter two slept on the floor after the evening meal was over. A door at the other end of the dining salon led into the trading store, where another couple had padded the hard floor with pandanus matting before retiring.

The *Vaitere* is one of the better kept of today’s South Sea schooners. Her normal run is between Tahiti and the Marquesas, touching the Tuamotus on her way back. When I say touching the Tuamotus I do not mean all seventy-eight islands—usually Takaroa, Takapoto and maybe one or two others, as the need arises.

There was a slight breeze waiting for us outside Papeete, and that was enough to send my roommates to their bunks. The rest of the thirty passengers who traveled on deck all settled down for the voyage, no doubt having already made this voyage several times. The few who showed up at the dinner table were not encouraged by the sight of the limp forms sprawled in the bunks which formed an amphitheater with the dining-room table in the center.

I will not bother the reader with an extensive narrative of the voyage. Inter-island travel on these schooners is routine, and my report on the *Hiro* would only be duplicated.

Many of the islands are uninhabited and seldom visited. Nevertheless, the traveler who wanders into this maritime maze will be rewarded by what he sees. These Dangerous Islands are not sizable or comfortable, but they are rich in the realm of color. The debauch of color found in the Tuamotu lagoons is incomparable to that of any other island group. Many of the islands have interesting local history. No less than two schooners have found a last resting place at Vahitahi, the *Denise* and the *Hotu*. Reao is the domain of the lepers of French Oceania. Hikueru, the richest pearling lagoon, was terribly stricken during the hurricane of 1906, and five hundred lives were lost. Makatea is the phosphate producer. Raroia is the island upon which the *Kon Tiki* expedition landed and which several years later lured back one of the expedition members, Dr. Bengt Danielsson, for an extensive acultural study of the Tuamotus. Takaroa was the scene of the beaching of the *County of Roxburgh* in 1906. Takapoto, already mentioned, was the island upon which Roggeveen lost the *African Galley* in 1722.

Between these islands are swift currents which keep out of these waters all but those who have business or the curiosity to bring them there. Yet I would advise any man to disregard the discomforts of the ancient methods of transportation, for the sake of a few days in the Tuamotus. You will never regret the close company you kept on shipboard, the smell of copra, the lack of ice water, or the monotony of canned food from the little stuffy galley, for the journey is an experience you will never forget, and you will be happy to relate the details to anyone willing to listen.

I cannot overemphasize the coloring of the Tuamotu lagoons. There is very little sediment in these waters, and it is their purity which enables them to reflect the various hues of the skies so well. Even from a slight point of elevation, say ten feet, the coloring is fantastically beautiful. The shading runs from every imaginable blue and azure to pale greens, and this delightful combination is fringed on the lagoon side by a white sandy beach. There is an intense amount of light during the noon hours which further accentuates the beauty of these lagoons. Although my wanderings have taken me to almost every corner of the globe, nowhere have I been so deeply impressed by nature's prodigality of color as in this almost unknown group of islands. My only regret is that I was able to visit only about fourteen of these wonderful atolls.

Ahead of us loomed the elongated form of Takaroa. The pass was too small for the *Vaitere*, but on the left bank there was a small wharf,

large enough to berth the vessel. It was noon as we docked. The sun beat down on this little lost community, and there was no shade except in the interiors of the houses of the village. Almost the entire population was on hand to greet familiar and new arrivals. Although the *Vaitere* touched Takaroa about once a month, one would think this was only an annual affair; there was so much gaiety and sincerity in the manner of greeting among the native population.

I was immediately impressed with the village. It is small but neat as a pin and almost like a model village on some square. Each house has a small front yard surrounded with bleached chunks of coral. Most roofs are of corrugated metal, enabling the collection of precious rain water. The main street winds for about two hundred yards and then thins out into a path which starts a long trail on the lagoon side of the atoll.

I had with me a letter from a girl in Papeete whose father was the chief of Takaroa. His name is Tamaha. Naturally Tamaha was on the wharf, and I was surprised to find a deviation from the usual type of native village chief. Tamaha is a fine young man about thirty years old who rapidly and with visible pride introduced me to his six daughters. They are all Paumotu girls.

I should explain that the islands are known as the Paumotus as well as the Tuamotus. Today the term "Paumotu" is generally used in designating an inhabitant of the Tuamotus. Racially speaking, there has been less foreign infiltration; therefore the natives are of purer blood than their brothers in Tahiti. This is quite noticeable from a dental viewpoint. The white man's food has caused much dental decay among the Tahitians. The deviation from their old fish diets, their hundred-per-cent nature diets, their tendency to the use of canned foods, has caused havoc in their mouths. Not so with the Paumotus for, due to their isolation, this evil is not so evident. The Paumotu language is different from the Tahitian. They do have a K in their alphabet, which the Tahitians do not.

The Paumotus are a proud race. The French Government has abolished the use of strong spirits in these islands in an effort to prevent some of Tahiti's bad habits from finding fertile soil in the Tuamotus. It is also practically impossible to obtain permission from the French Government to reside in the Tuamotus. The government is interested in keeping these islands as they are and the race as pure as possible.

For some reason a comprehensive, contemporary description such as we have on other island groups in Polynesia has never been written about the life and habits of the Tuamotus. Much of today's information is the result of the descriptions of some observant sea captain or a missionary, colonial administrator or trader, and is

mainly restricted to the particular views of the narrator. No more than half a dozen tropical studies or thorough professional anthropological studies exist on this group of islands. Among the students and authorities on the Tuamotus are Stimson, Emory, Danielsson, Burroughs and the missionary Father Audran. Dr. K. P. Emory, who made an extensive survey of the Tuamotus in 1929 on behalf of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, expressed his opinion about the Tuamotus as follows:

> "The dangers to navigation in these waters, the hostility of the natives, and the more alluring commercial prospects of the high islands, and the richer harvest which they held for the missionaries, so held up the advance of western civilization in the Tuamotus that there are natives today in the eastern part of the region who reached adolescence before missionary or trader had effected any important change in their ancient mode of living. The rising generation will be as completely Europeanized as the present day Tahitian, but as long as natives of such far islands as Fangatau, Vahitahi and Reao born in the 70's and 80's are still alive, it will be possible to hear the ancient chants exactly as they were handed down from generation to generation in the past, and to learn how their ancestors lived."

Directors Report on the Bishop Museum 1929-1931. Tuamotu Scientific Expedition.

There are various schools of thought concerning the name of the Tuamotus. For instance, the Wilkes exploring expedition in the middle of the last century reported that the native name was Pakumotu, translated into Tahitian as Paumotu, and that the word *paku* means cloud, so that the whole name could be interpreted as "a cloud of islands." Moerenhout refers to this island group as Pomotu or "the islands of the night." He seems to give no explanation why this strange name was bestowed. The old native appellation, Paumotu, seems to indicate that after the French took over the islands the Tahitians considered them islands which were finished with, or conquered. At a meeting of the native assembly in 1951, at a special request of the delegates from Tuamotu islands, the French Government officially changed the name from Paumotu, which was considered humiliating, to Tuamotu. However, the word *Paumotu* is frequently heard today and is generally used as a designation for an inhabitant of the Tuamotus. The word *motu*, which often perplexes the newcomer, refers to that part of a reef which has vegetation growing on it and which is surrounded by water or arid beach rock. In translating this word into English and using the word *island* we miss out on the specific characteristics of the word *motu* as the Polynesians know it. *Motu* specifically means that the island is surrounded by water but that it may also be surrounded or separated from another similar island by dry, arid beach rock, and there is always some

vegetation.

From existing records, it would seem reliable to state that Pedro Fernandez De Quiros was the original discoverer of the Tuamotu islands, although when he passed through this archipelago in 1606, while searching for Australia, he sighted only a small number of the seventy-eight atolls. As longitude at that time could only be determined by dead reckoning, it was not very reliable, and most of De Quiros' observations were not of particular value to the navigators who followed him. It is safe to say, however, that De Quiros landed on the island of Anaa where his crew found a friendly reception by the natives, gifts were exchanged, and drinking water was obtained. After taking some coconuts De Quiros left the island and probably landed on Makatea, Niau and Matahiva. The Dutchmen, Le Maire and Schouten, sailed through the Tuamotus while on a trading voyage around the globe. They landed on almost every atoll they sighted, starting with the island of Pukapuka, which was logged on the 10th of April, 1616. At Takaroa these two explorers stopped some distance from the beach, and contact was established with the natives. From there Le Maire and Schouten went to Takapoto. Here they were met by hostile natives, "Indians" as they were referred to in those days. Le Maire notes that the natives, after boarding the vessel and exchanging gifts, got into the gallery and pulled out the nails in the portholes of the cabins belonging to the supercargo and the skipper, and concealed them on their persons. They seemed very greedy for metal and thought they could drag out the bolts of the ship.

The next European on record to arrive in the Tuamotus was Jakob Roggeveen in 1722. He followed the track of Le Maire and Schouten. The island of Tikei was probably discovered by him. Unfortunately, the *African Galley* became separated from the other ships and was wrecked on the reef of an island. As far as can be reconstructed, this island which Roggeveen called "Pernicious Island" was Takapoto. The remarkable thing about the loss of the *African Galley* is that five sailors from his fleet decided to stay there. They disappeared during one of the foraging parties. When finally the vessels were ready to depart, they showed up on shore and shouted to the crew instructions to greet their friends and relatives in Amsterdam and to tell them that they were going to settle there. Following Roggeveen was the Britisher, Byron, on the vessels *Dolphin* and *Tamar*. They are credited with the discovery of Napuka and Tepoto on the 7th of June, 1765. However, once more the hostile attitude of the natives prevented their landing. Byron also touched Takaroa. His crew was desperately in need of scurvy grass and fruit of any kind, and it took gunfire to scare the natives away to one corner of the island while some of the crew went ashore and were able to collect coconuts and scurvy grass without

interference. Byron's men also made an historical find: they discovered the carved head of a rudder, apparently of Dutch origin. (Perhaps it was from the longboat of the *African Galley*.) Following Byron's visit to the Tuamotus came a number of ships not of great importance in the record. However, after sailing through the Tuamotu group, Wallis landed for the first time on Tahiti. To him may be credited the discovery of Pinaki and Nukutavake. Wallace's accompanying vessel, the *Swallow*, skippered by Carteret, also sighted three islands in the southernmost part of the group. One year later, in 1768, Bougainville sighted eleven of the atolls. Then came Captain Cook who in 1769 named seven atolls also in the southern part of the group, while he was on his way to Tahiti.

The Spanish expedition of Langara followed, this being mainly Spain's answer to the British penetration of the Pacific which they had looked upon as their sphere of interest. Langara sighted six of the Tuamotu atolls but failed to show any interest in them, especially when the natives met his men with a rain of stones. After Langara came Captain Edwards on the *Pandora* in 1791. He passed through south of Marutea and Tureia. Only months later Captain Bligh, while on his second voyage to Tahiti, discovered one more of the Tuamotu atolls, namely Tematangi. No exploring was done on this island at that time. The missionary ship *Duff* passed through the Tuamotu group twice, and the crew are reported to have sighted Marutea, Pukarua, Takaroa, Takapoto, Arutea and several others.

The Russians appeared next on the scene with several expeditions in the South Pacific: Otto von Kotzebue in 1815, Bellingshausen in 1819, Lazarev in 1821, and Kotzebue once more in 1823. Thaddeus Bellingshausen in 1821 discovered no less than ten of the Tuamotu atolls: Amanu, Fangatau, Raroia, Takume, Nihiru, Katiu, Tahanea, Faaite, Fakarava, Niau, and Matahiva.

About this time French explorers were also active in the South Pacific: Moerenhout in 1828, du Petit-Thouars in 1836, Dumont d'Urville in 1837 and Jacques Inot in 1840. The expedition of Abel du Petit-Thouars was a Government expedition which had orders to report on the whale fisheries in the South Pacific, for the benefit of the French industry. Also there was a slight punitive chore which du Petit-Thouars had to perform for his government. After arriving in Tahiti, he handed an order to Queen Pomare requesting that a letter be written to the King of France with an apology for mistreatment of two priests and also an indemnity of 2000 piastres. Furthermore, she was to salute the French flag and fire twenty-one guns from the Tahitian port. Queen Pomare acquitted herself by sending the letter and the 125 ounces of gold but was unable to give the twenty-one-gun salute, since the fort had no powder; du Petit-Thouars obliged by supplying

the powder. Next morning at 8:00 a.m., as the French flag was unfurled on the expedition ship *Venus*, the Tahitian fort gave the salute.

The British also supplied their share of visitors to the Tuamotu group: Turnbull in 1800; George Anson Byer in 1824; Frederick Beechy on the *Blossom* in 1828; the famous *Beagle* with Captain Robert Fitzroy, 1831; Edward Belcher on the vessel *Sulphur* in 1836; and Edward Russell on the *Acteon* who also visited Pitcairn Island in 1836.

In the early part of the nineteeth century, the American interest in the South Pacific was stirred mainly in American sailors and traders and whalers, but these men were not the students of Polynesian culture nor the historians who could have supplied information, as they had not been so trained. Finally in 1841 the government of the United States approved an expedition which was known as the Wilkes Expedition, named after Charles Wilkes, commander of the sloop of war, *Vincennes*, 780 tons. The aim of this expedition was set forth as follows:

> "The expedition is not for conquest, but discovery. Its objects are all peaceful. They are to extend the empire of commerce, science, to diminish the hazards of the ocean, point out to future navigators a course by which they may avoid dangers and find safety."

The ships commissioned for this journey were the *Vincennes*, the *Peacock*, the *Porpoise*, the *Seagull*, the *Flying Fish*, and a store ship named the *Relief*. On board this fleet were philologists, conchologists, botanists, minerologists, naturalists and horticulturalists. After losing the *Seagull* with a crew of fifteen in a gale off the coast of Peru, the fleet finally sailed for the Tuamotu Archipelago where numerous islands were surveyed. The island of Ahi, named Fliegen by Le Maire and Schouten (because of the many flies encountered there) was renamed Peacock Island after one of the ships to indicate that a true position had been computed for this atoll.

The previous lack of activity and interest in the South Pacific by the United States was more than compensated for by the Wilkes Expedition, whose work showed Captain Cook's own high standard of observation. Although the voyage took place after Polynesia had been combed and explored by others, several islands were newly discovered. Both the layman and scholar can pore over the volumes which were the result of this expedition with feelings of gratitude for the entry of the United States into the field of South Pacific exploration.

The influence of the early missionaries and traders had considerable effect on the islands economy. The religious expansion

which these green pastures afforded to the newly arrived missions could not be overlooked. Also many traders decided to use Papeete as a home port while trying their luck in the Tuamotus. These were exclusively tempted by the mother-of-pearl shell and the pearls from the lagoons of the atolls. Apparently one of the first to notice the presence of mother-of-pearl and pearls was a crew member on one of Roggeveen's ships.

The natives were quick to learn that the shell and pearls held financial fascination for the white man, and we note that, as early as 1790 and 1800, diving for these shells with remuneration as a goal was already in process. American and British pearl fishers were seen in Papeete's streets in the 1830's, and there are records of one pound of pearls being an average haul for every twenty tons of shell. Needless to say, at that period there was no control of the mother-of-pearl industry as it exists today, and as the years went by the rich lagoons were almost "dived clean of their valuable shell. The Wilkes Expedition reported that from 1832 to 1838 the Tuamotus had been very productive, and they estimated the annual production at about 900 tons.

In 1845 the French squadron under du Petit-Thouars formally took possession of the Marquesan Islands. In that same year, the Society Islands became a French protectorate. Since Queen Pomare looked upon herself as the ruler of the whole of the Tuamotu group as well, the French commander did not go to the trouble of having each atoll sign a deed of cession and looked upon them as ceded along with the Society Islands. Troops were stationed in the Marquesas and in Tahiti, but the islanders in the Tuamotus in most cases were completely unaware of the fact that they were under French protection, and it took time for them to discover what it meant to have representatives of a European power among them. As the French had their problem in the Marquesas and Tahiti which kept them fully occupied, it was a considerable time before organized administration of the Tuamotu group took place.

An American Mormon missionary preceded the French authorities in the penetration of the Tuamotus. Benjamin Gruard landed on the island of Anaa and was immediately successful. He preached, baptized, held sermons almost daily. He established Mission branches and, during a period of four months and twenty-one days, baptized no less than six hundred twenty persons. In 1851 the first Catholic missionary arrived on the island of Anaa, and three more by 1853. Quarrels arose between natives who remained faithful to Mormonism and those who had switched to the new faith. A French gendarme was killed, and some of the Catholic missionaries were badly manhandled. In Tahiti, the Governor, not tolerating such aggression in French

Oceania which since 1842 had been looked upon as a French protectorate, dispatched a punitive expedition. Several of the ringleaders were hanged, while others were transported for further trial in Tahiti. It would seem French authorities had adopted the policy of letting the Catholic missionaries penetrate the group of atolls ahead of *chefs* or administrators. The record shows that the Governor of Tahiti had even asked one missionary to act as his representative on Faaite and Fakarava, but that the offer was turned down. Finally after the arrival of Catholic missionaries, the French sent a gendarme to live on the island of Anaa. He acted as administrator for the French Government.

One can assume that the first missionaries were responsible for creating new needs among the islanders. These needs became the cause for their eagerness to earn money by diving for mother-of-pearl shell and making copra. One of the first deeds of the missionaries was that of teaching the almost naked natives to dress, and to point out to them the superiority of the white man's articles such as frocks, shirts, trousers, wire, hooks and many other possibly useful objects.

Some time around 1840, the natives on some of the atolls in the western part of the group began experimenting with coconut oil for export. Wilkes reports that previously only small quantities for their own use had been manufactured, as well as some for occasional trading voyages to Tahiti. Records show that the island of Anaa produced 200 tons of coconut oil in 1860. Takaroa produced 30 tons, Manihi 20, Papataki approximately 20, Kaukura 15, Taiaro 15, Fakarava about 8 tons. The total for the whole group was in the neighborhood of 400 tons. Their method of preparing this oil was naturally primitive and most ineffective. The ripe nuts were grated by means of an iron blade, the pulp was put into a container, and this was then watered with the liquid of the fruit, coconut water, and sometimes sea water was added. This entire mixture was then left to ferment in the sun, care being taken to cover the container in case of rain. As the oil exuded from the tissue, it was gathered and thereafter stored in the trunks of hollow coconut palms. This was the forerunner of the copra industry of today. The Germans were the ones responsible for the new method of drying the copra kernels entirely, then exporting them. Much labor was saved, and drying platforms were unnecessary due to the dry air in the Tuamotus.

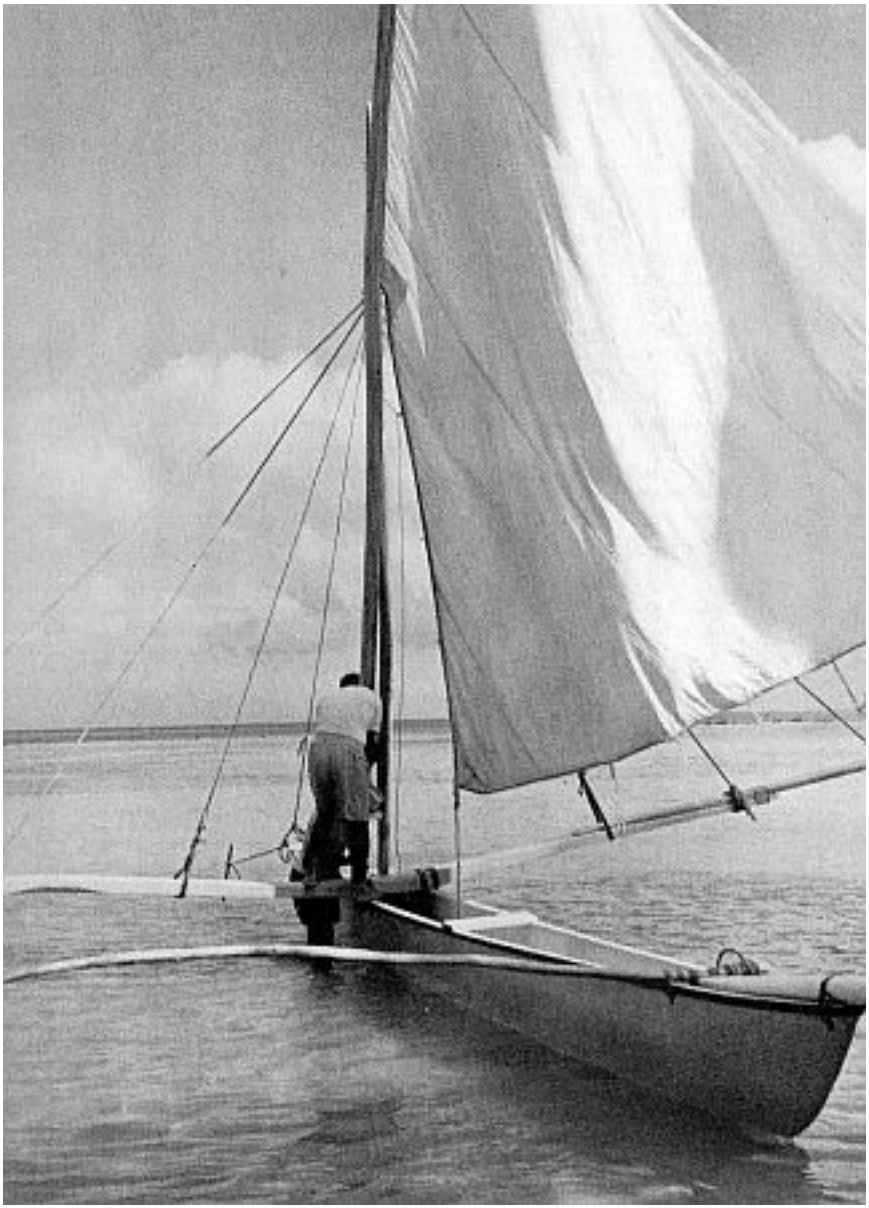
The entire administration of what is now known as French Oceania became French as recently as 1880. The French Government ratified the cession in December 1880, and from that day on all the islands which had previously formed the Protectorate became a French colony, thus making all the natives French citizens. Two of the important events since that time were the cyclone of 1903 and the big

hurricane of 1906. The effect of World War I was hardly noticed in the Tuamotus, with the exception of the influenza epidemic which did eventually reach the islands, causing the death of from seven to eight hundred people. The stock market crash of 1929 had its effect upon these islands: as a result of it, people here suddenly found themselves with surplus stock of copra for which there was no buyer. Plantations became neglected, the regular revenue dwindled, and the natives immediately returned to some of their ancient habits, mainly a sea-food diet or eating strictly off the land. World War II caused French Oceania to be temporarily isolated by the fall of France. However, economic relations with Australia were resumed after the colony sided with de Gaulle in 1940.

Of all the islands in French Oceania, the Tuamotus are still the least affected by the white man's culture, even though you will see the natives use the same tools we do, the same clothes, bicycles, and in some cases kerosene refrigerators. Corrugated roofing is much in demand due to the value it has in collecting rain water.

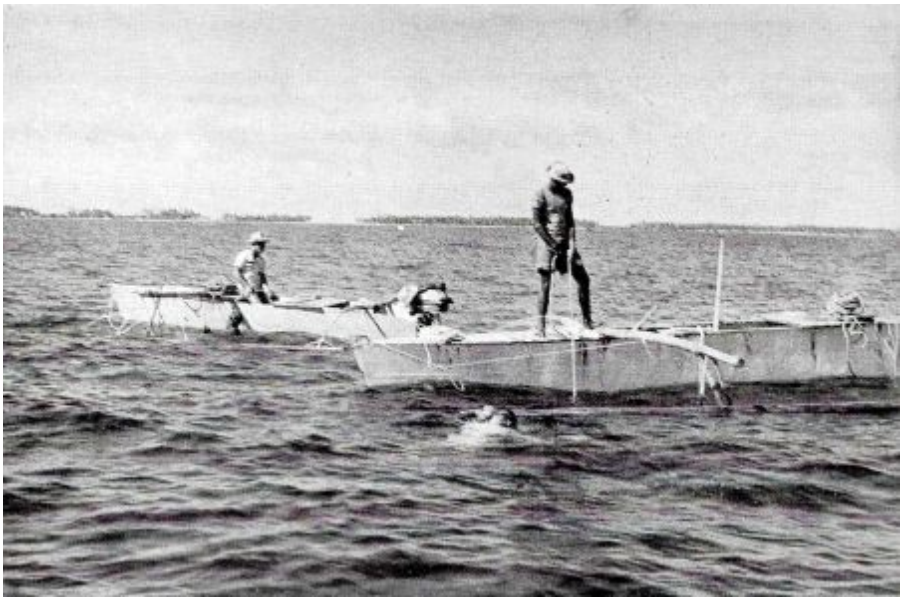
The most recent census shows that about 5000 of the Tuamotu inhabitants are pure Polynesian; about 700 mixed Polynesian; 50 or so Chinese; 15 Caucasians.

PHOTO SECTION IV



A Bora-Bora outrigger

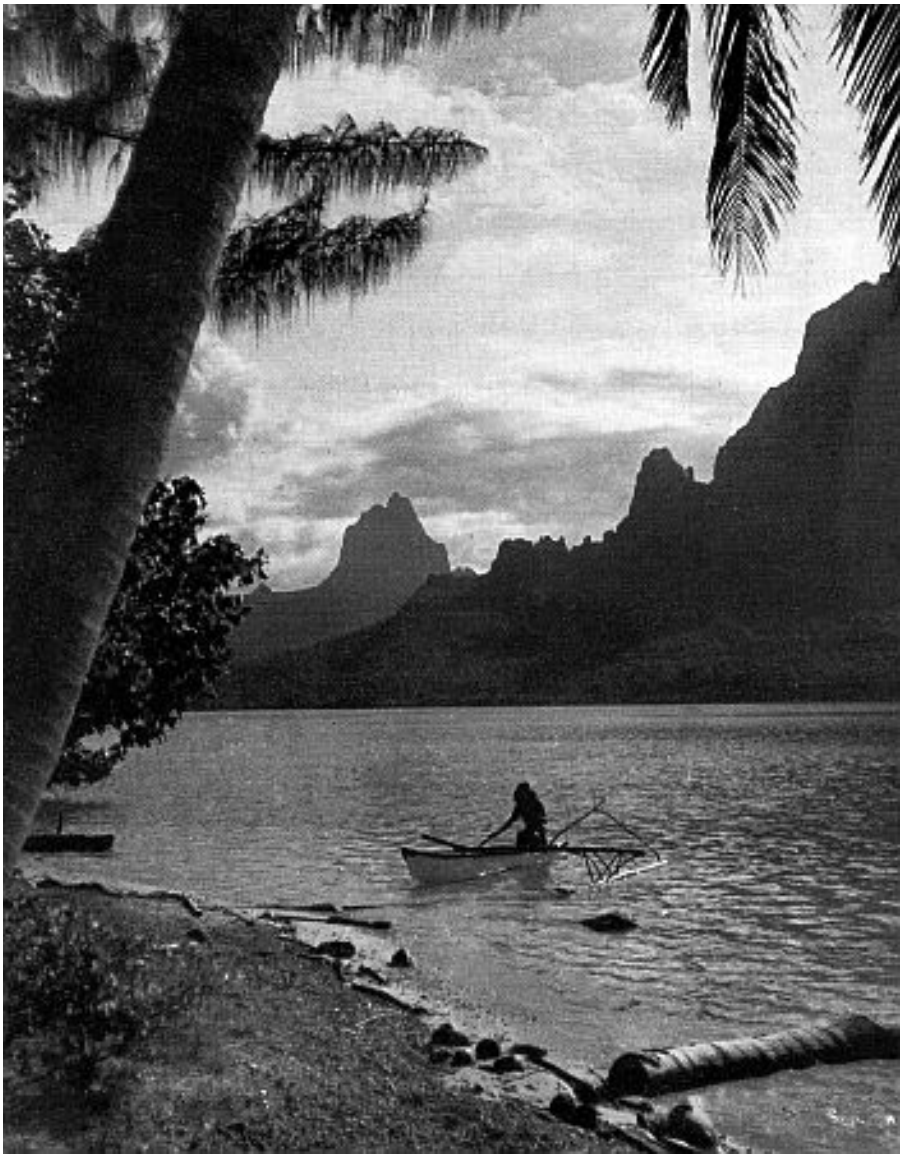
An Island Administration Building



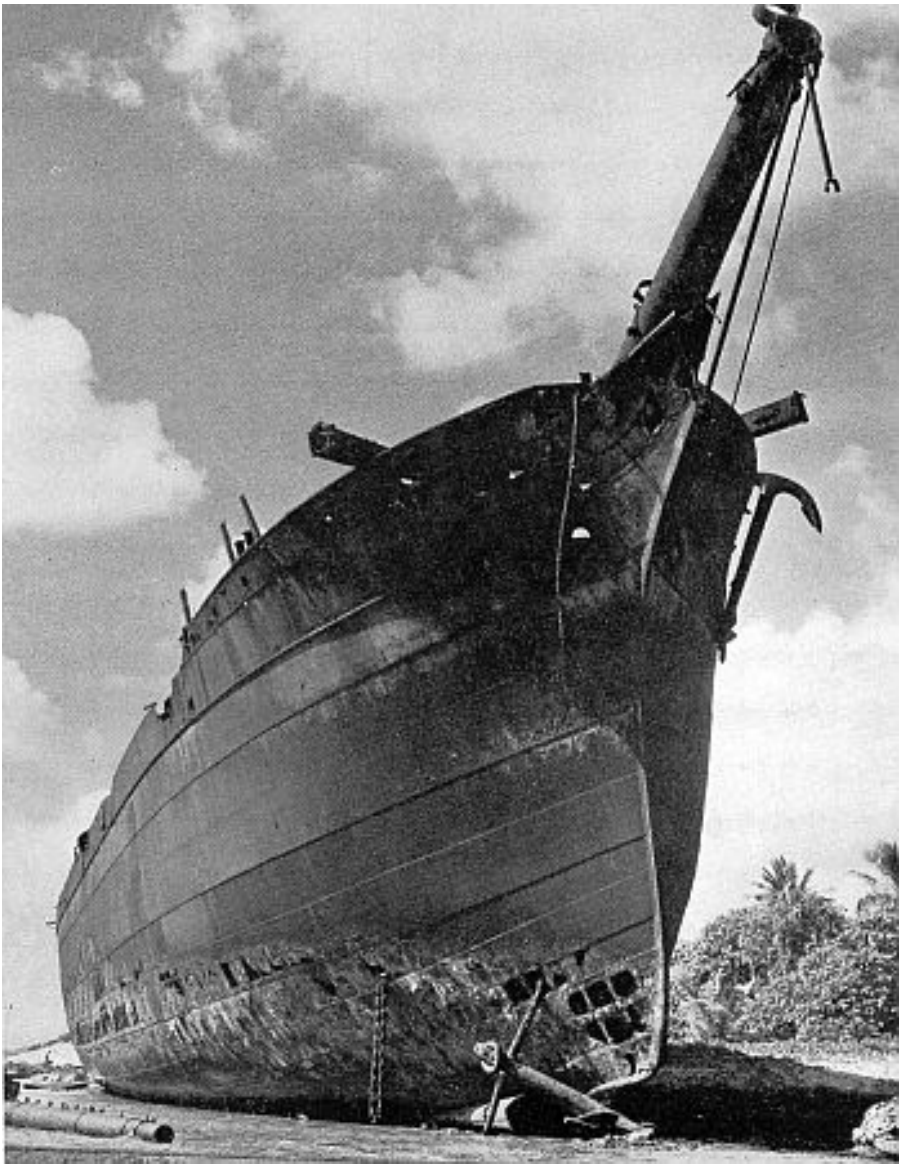
Mother-of-pearl divers, Takapoto, Tuamotu Islands

Over 6000 miles from Broadway

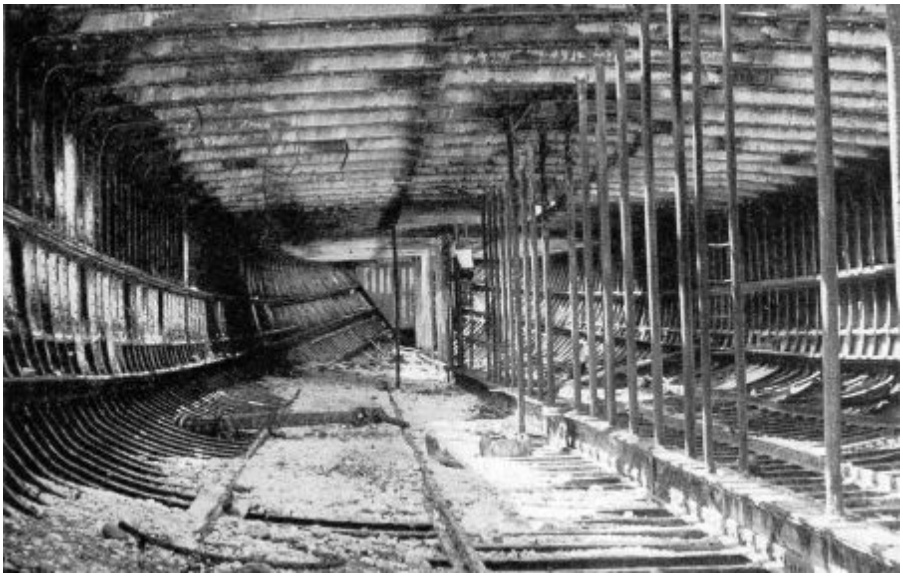
Maracura of Papetoai



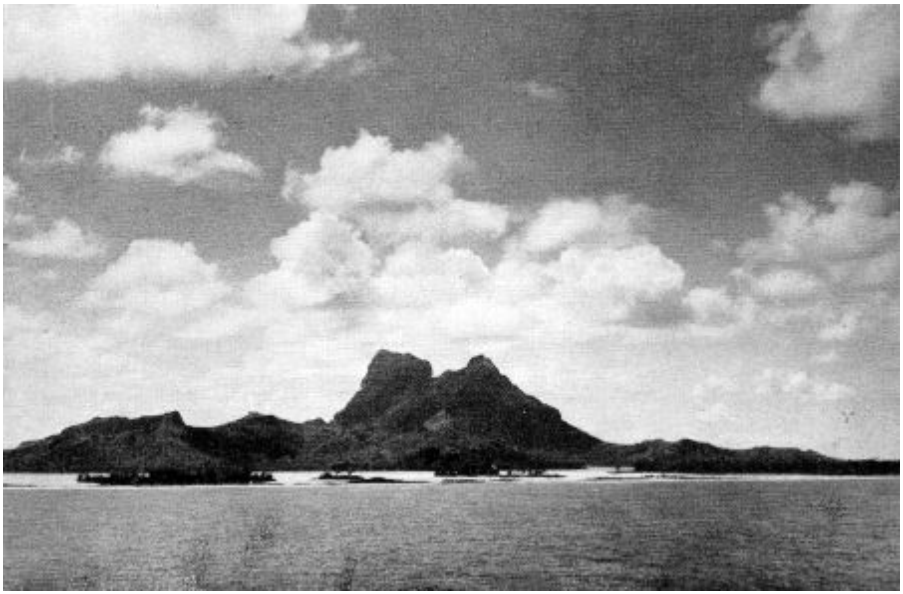
Maracura comes to stay



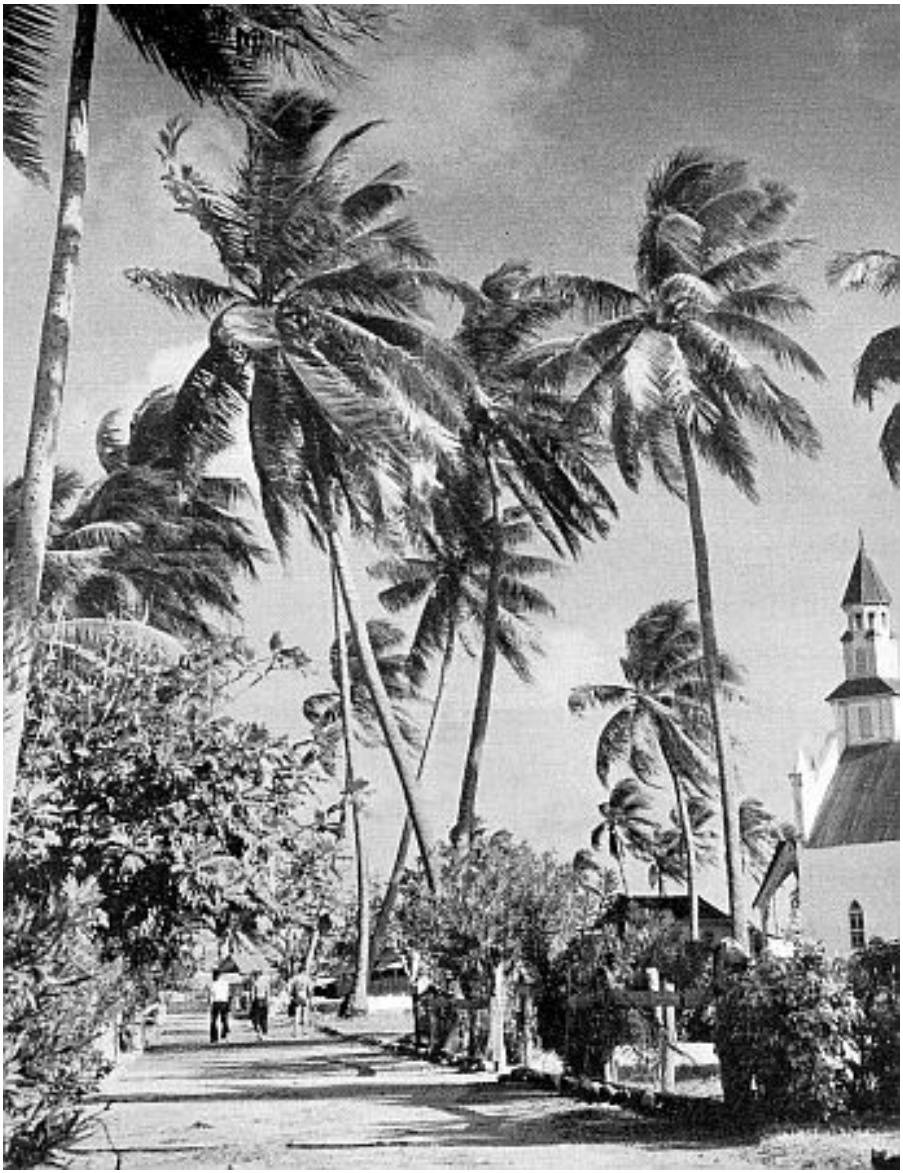
The *County of Roxburgh* on the reef at Takaroa, Tuamotu Islands



Interior view of same wreck



Approaching Bora-Bora



Main street in Takaroa, Tuamotu Islands

CHAPTER 20

To return now to the six pretty full-blooded Polynesians and their father: They were taking me to their home which was only a short distance from where the *Vaitere* had docked. As this was the time of year when copra is gathered in some of the more remote parts of the atoll group, where the copra production takes place only periodically, one can assume that on the morning of our arrival probably only twenty-five per cent of the inhabitants of Takaroa were in the village. These were mostly the younger children and the older folks. As a sail appears on the horizon, the ancient cry goes down the lagoon from mouth to mouth, and therefore in a reasonably short time the native who is working furthest away from the village is aware of the fact that a schooner is in sight; he ceases his activities for the day and hurries to the village to receive and dispatch merchandise or just join the curious crowd to welcome anyone on board. The ancient hail, which is the alert for this gathering of the natives from the various locations on their atoll, is a long-drawn out, plaintive wail: "Teeeee-Roooo." Actually the word *Tero* in the Paumotu dictionary has no meaning. It is derived from the ancient whaling days and is directly connected with our expression: "Sail-Ho." The Paumotu natives have used their phonetic adaptation of this hail.

At Tamaha's home, a new series of introductions took place: to his wife, his daughters' children, the neighboring children who were playing around the yard, and some idle young men which a bevy of six daughters is bound to attract. Tamaha's home is neat and built of plain lumber, covered with corrugated roofing. It has a wooden floor and a huge, odd-shaped water tank, more or less triangular in shape, which stands atop some wooden pilings. The latter would attract the attention of any observer. Tamaha perceived my interest and hastened to explain what I had guessed about the weird structure. It is a water tank removed many years ago from the *County of Roxburgh*. I knew well what the *County of Roxburgh* was. It was one of my reasons for visiting Takaroa.

During the great hurricane of 1906, which was the basis for Jack London's *Typhoon* and Nordhoff and Hall's *Hurricane*, a large four-masted barque had been cast on the reef, not far from the village of Takaroa. She was the *County of Roxburgh*, home port Glasgow, loaded with a cargo of phosphate from Makatea. The next day Tamaha and I were to pay her wreck a visit.

Meanwhile, Meona, Tamaha's wife, installed me on a corner of the porch which ran around three sides of the building, and I found

myself in the enviable position of sharing the house with Tamaha's six daughters, his wife, and three small baby girls, a total of ten women. Across from the house stood an attractive, well-kept church, the Mormon mission which is strongly represented in the Tuamotus. I could not help noticing the extreme youth of the present-day Mormon missionary as compared with the more experienced and older men of the past generation.

The two youths who had shared the sleeping quarters of the *Vaitere* with me were both under twenty-four years of age. From my conversation with them, I gathered that they had both been sent directly from Utah and were to be in charge of the Mormon mission in Takaroa after first undergoing some local indoctrination in Papeete.

There is nothing against a capable youth filling an important position in business or society, but it would seem that a man at the ripe age of twenty-four is still in his formative years, and it is questionable whether he is adequate in guiding others. I may be wrong, but by what right do we send our young men to these happy islands to point out to the natives that smoking and coffee drinking are sins? It would seem that the expense involved might be spent in more worthily by helping our own abused American Indian. These conclusions, right or wrong, are not meant to be an attack on the Mormon mission but rather intended to point out some of the aspects of missionary work in Polynesia. On the other hand, after having observed some of the missions of other denominations, I must hand it to the Mormons for accomplishing physically more than the others in French Oceania. Their help to the natives in personal problems, transportation, sickness and so forth is something which cannot be disregarded.

Sitting on the porch of Tamaha's house, looking across the immense lagoon which this atoll encloses, and observing the unhurried ways of the Tuamotus, I found myself wondering just how deeply the hundred years of religious regimentation had affected the primitive mind. If suddenly every missionary in Polynesia were to be withdrawn, how long would the indoctrination so painfully instilled survive the inborn Polynesian abandon and *joie de vivre?*

Right then I was the third white man on Takaroa, and my host's household was bustling to prepare dinner. Taking Tamaha aside, I explained to him that I was used to and appreciated native food and did not need *maa popaa* (white man's food) and wished him to go to no special expense or labor on my account. Even so, the meal was a feast: curried clams; raw maua, which is the edible part of a sea shell found on the reef only; boiled rice; baked breadfruit; and marinated paihere, one of the most delicious fish in Oceania. That night was one of the most beautiful I have encountered during my wanderings in the

South Pacific. There was a full moon, and scarcely a breeze whispered through the palm trees. The lagoon was a gigantic lake which reflected the slightest shadow and light as a few clouds drifted over the face of the moon. By the lagoon edge, the water was so intensely clear that the white sandy bottom made a light background for the fish which abound in these lagoons. Three of Tamaha's daughters were humming and singing softly to the occasional chords of the guitar: quaint old songs of the islands which will survive as long as there are Paumotus to sing them. In this serene setting, draped in a pareu, I slowly let sleep overcome me as I lay on the old couch on the porch of Tamaha's house.

Early the next morning, Tamaha and I preceded the long line of females to the little *fare pape*, the three-quarters-enclosed bathhouse only a few steps away from the house. We were planning an early departure for the lagoon in a small boat powered with an outboard motor. Our goal was the *County of Roxburgh*, five miles down the lagoon. Before casting off, we were joined by Fatao, the radio operator of Takaroa. He usually works at his occupation only in the evenings when reception is clear.

Fatao is the husband of Germaine, *the* Germaine who is the outstanding dancer of the entire South Pacific. Coming from Vaitape, Bora-Bora, this girl has the gift of holding an audience in the palm of her hand when she dances. It is ridiculous to try to describe on paper her dance and the emotional facial expressions of ecstasy which thrill her audience. One must see her to feel the strange power which is absorbed when Germaine does a true, ancient Bora-Bora dance. For several years now she has been the number-one girl of that island's dance team at the Bastille Day celebrations in Papeete. I knew Germaine Leverd well, and Fatao was glad to talk with somebody who had recently seen his wife in Papeete. "Germaine," he said, "is too lively a girl to stay on this quiet island, so I work here; she does her dancing in Papeete. That way, we both make money and get together every so often in Tahiti and have fun while the money lasts."

The lagoon on which we were now traveling is a long one in contrast to the circular ones described earlier. It was reported as late as 1950 that the Takaroa atoll appeared to be incorrectly charted and should be rotated clockwise through an arc of 15° about its northeastern point. This lagoon is treacherous, for here and there in deep water there will suddenly appear a coral head the size of a small house, barely awash. The Paumotus have a wisely chosen name for a coral head just awash, and a different one to indicate a coral head which is maybe four or five feet below the surface but still visible; and still a different name for the coral head at a depth of ten or twelve feet which is also visible; and, finally, a name for a coral head rising from

the bed of the lagoon but which is invisible from a boat. On some of the coral heads of the former group, those just barely visible, a boulder or bamboo pole has been placed so that it can be spotted more easily.

The wind was against us that morning, and we arrived at the other extremity of the lagoon soaked to the skin by spray. Some food and my camera had been wrapped in a piece of canvas by foresighted Tamaha, and we didn't mind the soaking because we had on our old lagoon clothes, just anything for an expedition of this sort. We found a likely landing place, and the three of us managed to lift the boat out of the water onto the rugged coral shore so that it would not be battered during our absence. Carrying our few provisions, we started across the island in the direction of the ocean. The island was no wider than three hundred yards and densely planted with coconut palms. There were traces of the path used by copra workers when they come to gather the falling nuts. Soon we arrived at the ocean side of the atoll.

I was unprepared for the sight which so unexpectedly presented itself. No sooner had we left the last bushes and palm trees than we faced the rusty hulk of a huge vessel in complete upright position. She was high and dry on the coral, and two hundred yards separated her from the sea which on that fateful night in 1906 had ejected her from its bosom. A few huge jagged holes, like holes made in a tin can by a mad wielder of a can opener, were caused by the coral on the night of her stranding. She measures forty-two feet high from her keel to her main deck, and on her stem the faded lettering is still discernible: County of Roxburgh, Glasgow. Her entire hull, 289 feet of it, makes an imposing sight on this picturesque atoll. The anchors and the sizable amount of anchor chain can be seen from the bowsprit. A third anchor hangs by one fluke from the side of her top deck at a precarious angle. Fear not, it has been in that position for fifty years and will undoubtedly hang there another fifty. So strong and in such good condition is the metal, forged iron, that the vessel shows little sign of wear after all this time. Tamaha informed me that her masts came down only five years ago, after natives had started a fire in her teak decks in order to remove some metal parts. The masts are now lying in two feet of water by the hull along with the spars and countless fathoms of rusted rigging cable. Loaded with phosphate, she was on her way to England when she was caught in that terrible hurricane which sowed death and destruction in the Tuamotus in 1906. A seventy-five-foot wave left her where she is today, after she had lost all her sails and had been tossing around at the mercy of the seas for forty-eight hours.

Ten of her crew preferred to take their chance in an open boat

before the final crash came. No sooner had they cast off from the vessel, than their boat capsized and all lost their lives. Those who stayed aboard were saved after the vessel miraculously landed in upright position on the coral. The *Roxburgh* was one of a fleet of ships which formed the Craig Line at the end of the nineteenth century —"Craigs Counties," as they were known, for each vessel bore the name of a county in the United Kingdom. This one had been built in 1886 and was an example of the finest workmanship in the shipbuilding of that era.

Upon entering the hull through one of the jagged holes in her side, I found myself in a cathedral-like expanse. The framework of the between-decks from the keel on up to her topmost deck was a network of T and I beams, solid metal. So vast was this interior that a shout brought forth an echo. The metal beams and strakes were in surprisingly good condition, for I found that with one stroke of a file, clean white metal surface could be reached. (I always have a file, hacksaw and wrench with me when on these expeditions.)

We walked through the vessel, stepping in and out of her bilges throughout her length. The decks had been teak, but most of that had been removed. Some of the more inaccessible corners still showed traces of this wood, which was only very slightly worm-eaten and in fair shape, considering the time it had lain here. We climbed up ladders still usable and safe, from one deck to the next. In the forecastle the bunks had been arranged around the anchor windless capstan, as was the custom in those days, and above the various compartments were the British inscriptions such as, "Approved by the Board of Trade for 10 seamen," or "Boatswain's locker, approved for ⅝ of a ton, paints, supplies and varnishes." The main deck was another surprise because so much of it was still intact. As elsewhere the teak deck had vanished, but it was possible with a little care and nimble footwork to wander around anywhere. The boiler room, with single, old-fashioned, standing boiler, was almost intact. Her winches had been steam-operated and were now frozen by the rust and inactivity of many years. Aft was the metal frame of her cabin house. The paint was still clearly visible, and the old-fashioned border work and paneling still showed. Salvage was impossible, as there were many complications in removing the heavy metal parts: by way of the sea would have been impractical, for one could not depend on the weather long enough; through the lagoon it would have been too costly to bring suitably sized barges to the landing place. Besides, there are no barges in Takaroa. They would have had to be brought up from Tahiti. Furthermore, it would be impossible for these to come far enough inshore; then the return transportation to the village through the lagoon and from there to whatever ship might be waiting

outside would add to the task. Several salvage companies had looked over the old *Roxburgh*, Tamaha told me, but when all the above was taken into consideration, as well as the percentage due to the French Government for salvage rights, it was decided not worth the effort. This did not prevent me from pulling the hacksaw from my bag and removing a belaying pin from the pinrail of the mainmast, also a pair of sister hooks from the main brace. Remembering the result of too much salvage from the *Seeadler*, I did not remove anything else from the *Roxburgh*. I could well see that Tamaha must have had his hands full in removing his water tank from the wreck, for he had had to detach it, lower it over the side of the hull onto the coral, and then transport it to the lagoon side where it was rafted and towed to the village for final installation at his residence.

We spent the greater part of the day examining the various parts of the wreck and enjoyed our food in her shade on the coral. My companions then suggested getting back before the wind grew any stronger, and in due time we reached the village once more. When a good breeze is blowing, the water in these lagoons can get quite rough and even give a fair-sized whaleboat a bad time.

CHAPTER 21

The lagoon at Takaroa which is roughly eight miles long may seem large, but the largest by far of all the lagoons in the Tuamotu Archipelago is the island of Rangiroa, called by the natives Rahiroa. This word means very much, very big. It is the most populous island in the archipelago. The lagoon there measures forty-four miles in length, and is about seventeen miles wide. It is infested with sharks. Even today sailing directions mention, "No dependence can be placed on the accuracy of the charted topographic details of the north and south coasts." The northwestern end of Rangiroa was reported to lie about three miles farther westward than shown on the Hydrographic Office chart.

Let us look at the physical characteristics of some of the lesser-known islands of this fascinating archipelago. The island of Tikahau, once known as Krusenstern Island, is about twelve miles to the west of Rangiroa. It is circular in form, nearly fifteen miles in diameter. It is a wooded island in the center of the lagoon, and on all sides of the atoll there is growth. Vessels up to 60 tons can find access to the lagoon, but the currents of the pass are very strong and there are large patches of coral between the pass and the village, which has a population of about two hundred. Ahi Island, formerly known as Peacock Island (ex Fliegen), is about nine miles to the west of Manihi and is a wooded atoll with a population of one hundred twenty-five. Marutea Island (formerly known as Lord Hood Island) is nearly one hundred miles to the north-northwest of the Gambier group. It consists of a cluster of small islands on a barrier reef which is almost awash and only a few feet high. Brushwood and some coconut trees grow on the islands. The atoll is not inhabited but is occasionally visited by the natives of Mangereva for pearl shell. The Acteon Islands are actually a group of four: Maturei Vavau, Tenarurunga, Vahanga and Tenararo. Maturei Vavau is an atoll located about thirty-two miles to the north-northwest of Maria Island. It has trees in spite of the fact that at times it is completely awash. It is not accessible from the sea. Vahanga is a small atoll about five miles to the west of the first-mentioned island and is uninhabited, covered with coconut trees. There is no pass, not even for a small boat. Fangatau (also known as Cockburn Island) is a small, low atoll uninhabited. The barrier reef is narrow and submerged in a number of places. The current is very swift, and there is no pass into the lagoon. Maruroa (literally much shade), about twenty-two miles to the north-northwest of Fangatau, is an atoll about twenty miles long running in an east-northeast and west-southwest

direction. Its northwest side is low and almost covered by the sea. There is no permanent settlement here, but pearl shell is collected from time to time by divers from other atolls or from Papeete. The width of the lagoon is eight miles. There are a number of islands on this barrier reef, most of them well wooded.

Maruroa Island is another example of how limited the precise charting of these islands is even in this day. In 1948 Maruroa was reported to extend five miles farther west than previously charted. Tematangi Island (also known as Bligh's Island) is about ninety miles to the west of Maruroa, and seven miles in extent on the northwest and southeast sides, supporting a little vegetation consisting of low shrubs. The northwest side consists mainly of large blocks of coral over which the seas break violently. Normally the island is not inhabited, as it offers no other resources than mother-of-pearl. There is no pass into the lagoon, but landing can be effected on the northern side by whaleboat.

Tureia, also known as Papakena Island, is about sixty-two miles north-northeast of Maruroa. It is very low and well wooded except on the southeast side. The lagoon is not accessible from the ocean, and there are only a few inhabitants. Landing at the village on the north side of the island is dangerous and requires the use of a good surf boat. Vanavana Island (or Barrow) thirty-two miles to the west of Tureia, consists of a narrow strip of land enclosing a lagoon into which there is no passage. It is about one and three-quarter miles in extent and has a good deal of vegetation but is uninhabited. Nukutipipi Island (or Margaret Island) is a small atoll whose northern part is well wooded and has a small village; the barrier reef on the eastern side is flat and submerged. There is no passage into the lagoon. There is a water reservoir built by former inhabitants. Anu Anurunga (or Four Crowns of Quiros Island) is about thirteen miles to the west-northwest of Nukutipipi, four uninhabited islands on the encircling reef. There are some clumps of trees, and the reef is submerged on the south and west, but here and there some of the coral heads show. There is no pass into the lagoon.

Anuanuraro, Heretua (or Archangel of Quiros Island, as it was known) lies fourteen miles to the west of Anuanurunga. It is oblong in shape and wooded on the east side, in 1950 reported uninhabited. The reef extends off the northwest and southwest sides, on both of which there is a heavy surf, and there is submerged reef on the south and the west sides. Depths of eleven to sixteen fathoms and coral are found on the southwest side, where temporary anchorage can be obtained only during easterly winds. Hereheretue Island (St. Paul Island) lies eighty-eight miles north-northwest of Anuanuraro. There is no entrance into this lagoon, and the sea is frequently heavy, landing extremely

difficult except on the northwest side with winds from the southwest. The village of about three hundred inhabitants stands behind a grove of trees on the western side. The natives seldom venture outside the reef in their canoes.

Reao, the site of the leaper colony, is a narrow atoll about ten miles long, which runs northwest and southeast; when seen end-on, it does not appear more than one-half mile wide. With the exception of a few breaks on the southern shore, the land is almost continuous and covered with brush. Due to the extremities and angles, the ground here is higher than in other parts; it has both shrubs and coconut trees which can been seen from the deck of a ship as far away as fifteen miles. The enclosed lagoon is without an entrance and contains several small islets. The reef is quite steep all around. The leper hospital is a large white building, very conspicuous, on the southwest side of the atoll. In 1950 the population was reported to be three hundred fifty. Pukarua Island, with a population of one hundred fifty, lies thirty miles to the west-northwest of Reao.

And so one can wander from one island to the other, finding a cluster of natives on one, maybe a hundred on some, none on quite a few. Among some of the Tuamotu islands visited, it was my good fortune to be able to make a trip to the island of Takapoto (Pernicious Island, as Roggeveen had called it). One day, while in Papeete enjoying a cold beer at the Cercle Polynesien, Captain Frame, the British pilot of the local single Catalina plane, casually mentioned that he was due to make a flight within two days to the island of Takapoto. Further questioning on my part revealed that the plane was to carry a Government official to report on the mother-of-pearl fishing which was then in full operation in Takapoto. Still more pertinent questioning brought forth the admission that there might be room for one more on the plane, which was to make this a twenty-four-hour trip. I left half my beer on the counter and dashed down the stairs of the Cercle to the Messageries Maritimes office, the agents for the Catalina plane. Normally this plane, which is a converted PBY, is used only for flights between Bora-Bora, Raiatea, Tahiti; and this flight to the Tuamotu island was exceptional. No plane had ever landed in Takapoto, and neither Captain Frame nor his crew had ever been there. After ten minutes in the office of the Messageries Maritimes and the handing out of a fistful of francs, I emerged with a green slip of paper which entitled me to one seat on the seaplane which was to fly to Takapoto two days hence.

Accordingly, on the day of departure at 7:00 a.m. I showed up at the seaplane base and was taken by the launch to the waiting Catalina moored in the lagoon two miles from the city of Papeete. The fact that I had a window seat did not mean that I was to get a clear,

unobstructed view of all that would pass below us on this flight. The plane was old, the interior tired looking; and the window, a little oval plastic job, was cracked and worn in spots. However, it was better than having an aisle seat, for I would be able to observe at least some of the scenery en route.

Takapoto is about three hundred miles to the northwest of Tahiti. We flew over several beautiful atolls, and Frame very obligingly banked the plane each time an atoll was passed, in order to give me a better view. When not looking out the window at my left, I had another unusual spectacle on my right for, visible to only a little above his knees, was the plane's engineer. He was perched in some kind of saddle, facing an instrument board, and his legs touched two footrests halfway down the main cabin. It must be remembered that this was a converted navy patrol plane. On the other side of the engineer's limbs sat Spence Weaver, a Honolulu restaurant tycoon who spends a considerable amount of time every year roaming the South Seas. He, too, had heard of this special flight and had boarded the plane that morning. In the cockpit, perspiring and with terry towels hanging around their necks were Captain Frame and Duval, the French co-pilot.

After we had been flying for a few hours, a large atoll hove into sight. From 4000 feet, the height at which the plane was flying, we could see the thirteen-mile length of Takapoto. From the air this was a good opportunity to observe an atoll's characteristics. There was no pass, the elongated oval reef was studded with shrubs here and there, and the magnificent blue lagoon within was indeed a sight. Small white round patches, looking very much like an odd circle of confetti in a teacup, could be seen. These were the coral patches which mushroomed from the bed of the lagoon to the surface. Frame took the plane into a circular pattern of approach, concentrated at the southern tip of the lagoon. Five or six large turns were made over the entire width of the lagoon, which here was about three miles. A few grass shacks and the imposing red-painted corrugated roof of a church were visible. Finally Captain Frame located a possible strip of water free enough of coral heads for landing of the Catalina. Once more the plane banked, and a splendid vision of blue and pale green and sandy beach rushed up toward me. Then the plane straightened out, and seconds later the metal hull of the old PBY made contact with the water of the lagoon at Takapoto.

The plane came to a halt, and three canoes pushed off the beach, heading for us. Through the open hatch a conversation took place between Duval and the three or four natives in the canoes. Then Duval pulled his head back into the cabin and announced to Frame that this was Takapoto all right but that we had landed in the wrong place. The

village ahead of us was not now the main village. The pearl-shell diving was taking place eight miles further down the lagoon. A temporary main village had been set up at that site. Rather than take the plane into the air again, only to land eight miles further away, the captain decided to use one of the canoes which had an outboard as a pilot and to follow the native down the lagoon with the Catalina taxiing in his wake. So started the tedious eight-mile journey from one end of Takapoto to the other. The small canoe did not move very fast, and the plane's progress was thereby seriously handicapped. As the ventilation in the plane did not operate except in flight, the ten occupants in this small metal hull under the hot noonday sun were soaking wet with perspiration. I was glad to see the plane finally head for the beach; with a right turn the aircraft was brought to within fifty yards of a small white sandy shore. All kinds of canoes headed for us the moment our engines came to rest, and the ten passengers and crew, with overnight sacks and satchels, piled into any canoe that happened to be alongside at that moment.

From the narrow beach we were faced with an amazing spectacle. The entire population (now expanded to eight hundred though normally one hundred thirty) was awaiting our arrival. About twenty-five neatly dressed little girls from three to twelve years of age stood in a group to one side, each carrying a French flag. As soon as the canoes touched the beach and we walked ashore, as if by an invisible command, in shrill voices they sang a high-pitched version of the French national anthem, waving their flags. The rest of the people—mother-of-pearl divers, traders, administrators, wives and children, Chinese storekeepers—all stood facing us. In the front row, in a white linen suit which had evidently not seen bleach for a long time, stood the chief of the island with a black tie, a shirt to match his suit, and a gigantic red-white-and-blue ribbon crossing from his left shoulder to his right waist, diplomat style. This venerable person stood at attention as we landed. When all the canoes had deposited their loads on the beach, the chief took a few steps forward and proclaimed, '*Ia Orana Tatou!*' Welcome to Takapoto. We, the people of this island, are happy this day to welcome you from Tahiti to the island of Takapoto. We want each of you to feel that the island of Takapoto is your home during your stay with us. In honor of your arrival, which has had no precedent in the history of Takapoto, we are happy to inform you that a gigantic festive meal has been prepared. We are grateful for the opportunity which has befallen us to be your hosts for the next twenty-four hours. *Ia Orana Tatou.*"

Thunderous applause ensued, and then the traditional handshaking took place. Everybody from the plane shook hands first with the chief of the village and then with, I would say, at least four-

fifths of the remaining eight hundred, including the little girls who had burst into song at our arrival. A friendly argument broke out when decisions had to be made as to where each of us should stay for the night. Everyone on the island wanted to be honored by a house guest. A diver by the name of Martin and the solitary gendarme, who was on Takapoto only during the pearling season, vied for the honor of having Weaver and me in their humble homes. Eventually Martin seized me by the arm and marched me off to his hut, much as a buyer of a slave might have taken his recently acquired purchase to his home, while the gendarme settled for Weaver.

Martin's house, like the others, was just off the beach, fifty feet from the water. It was made of a plain corrugated roof and woven-palm-frond sides, like all the other dwellings in this village. There wasn't a brick or cement wall in this encampment, since it was to be used only for the sixty days of the pearling season. Martin, who is a diver from the island of Manihi, proudly introduced me to his wife and his two teenage daughters as well as to a little adopted daughter who was lying on a cot at one end of the porch around the hut. The child had an attack of appendicitis and was waiting for transportation to Papeete the next day on our plane. The sight of a new arrival in her hut made the youngster happy and probably caused her to forget her pain temporarily. After ten minutes with my new-found friends, Martin led me away from the house and announced that "the gigantic festive meal prepared by the people of Takapoto" was about to be served. We passed several of tire huts, and I noticed that some held grocery goods and were fitted out as stores. In one hut larger than the rest, the passengers and crew of the plane were gathered. We quickly compared notes and each found that he was king in the household which had adopted him for the next twenty-four hours. The luncheon was attended by the chief of the village and his wife, the gendarme and his girl friend, a Dutch professor who was temporarily residing here on an international South Pacific study mission, and a missionary. More speeches by our host preceded the luncheon, and then we worked our way through raw fish, roast pork, mashed potatoes, red wine, sourdough bread, and banana poi. This dining room was the back part of one of the larger Chinese stores. I noticed, with a dusty old price tag of 14,700 francs attached to it, an accordion high up on a shelf, and wondered who on earth might buy an accordion in this remote spot. I was to find out later in the day what a lopsided economy the Tuamotu atoll undergoes during the pearling season. It is truly a miniature gold rush. Out of this lagoon, in the short period of sixty days per year a daily total of 175,000 francs worth of mother-of-pearl shell is brought up. This means that the divers at the end of each day have more money or credit to their

names than they have for any other sixty days of the year.

The Chinese storekeepers in Tahiti are quick to grasp the opportunity for a fast dollar, so they rush to the atolls small extension stores with all kinds of merchandise. Goods which can never at other times be purchased are found suddenly—even in competition—during the diving season: outboard motors, bicycles, the accordion which I had seen, white gas lanterns, radios, electric mixers—things which an impulsive pearl-shell diver might take a fancy to while the money is burning hot in his pocket. Again, all items are sold at forty per cent above Papeete retail prices. The diver goes out in the morning, returns with his catch at three or four in the afternoon; his canoe is loaded with mother-of-pearl which is immediately weighed and bought by the Chinese. He can either receive money at once or build up credit with the Chinese merchant: either way he ends by buying some commodity which often is more a prestige purchase than a necessity. True, a bicycle or an outboard motor may be a necessity, or at least useful, but when you see a forty-five-piece set of blue willow chinaware selling for four times what it would be worth in any of our cities, you know this is a prestige purchase and someone is getting gypped. The native no more needs that than he needs a hole in his head. But it is something which he can show off and maybe something that his next-door neighbor does not have. Because it is there and available, and because he has money in his pocket, he has no sales resistance, and he buys. It is unfortunate that so much junk, so many useless articles, are allowed to be bartered for mother-of-pearl with the diver who may some day give his life for the sake of the valuable shell.

Takapoto is about three hundred yards wide from the lagoon side to the ocean side. The village we were in took up about half a mile of this narrow strip. Would you believe that in this temporary community I located no less than eleven Chinese stores, four motion picture houses and two pool halls? After the day's diving, there is one big rush for recreation which goes on far into the night.

Billiard tables which had been discarded from Chicago's pool halls were brought here by Darryl Shields, an American importer in Papeete. He in turn sold them to the Chinese. Then the Chinese shipped them on schooners to Takapoto or any other atoll where diving was in progress. The pool tables, dismantled, were wrapped in sacking and carried ashore through the crashing surf in a whaleboat. In Takapoto they were landed just next to the church we had first seen at our original landing. Then they were taken through the lagoon and put on a platform of canoes and transported eight miles down the lagoon, to be set up for play so that Mr. Diver, at the end of a day in the bottom of the lagoon, could experience some of the white man's

thrills and play billiards half the night. Naturally this leads to gambling. As mentioned before, alcohol is not allowed in the Tuamotus, but nevertheless it is available on the black market. Ask me not how it got there.

I spoke with the owner of one of the motion picture houses. Please do not for a moment envision a 20th Century-Fox theater, but try and imagine a seventy or eighty-foot enclosure with walls of woven palm fronds and a tin roof. A baggy old screen is supported at one end of the hall, and plain wooden benches without back rests are scattered all the way from this screen to the rear entrance in some semblance of order. The proprietor mentioned that he had no less than forty motion pictures on hand, mostly Westerns but some of the older A and B productions as well. As I recall, that night the selection of films shown on Takapoto was "Corregidor," "The Four Feathers," and two double-feature Westerns. Of course the four movies compete with one another and, as they are all located in a relatively small area and, furthermore, are playing at the same time, you can imagine how the cacophony disturbs the beautiful tropical night. Many of the Chinese stores have small generator units, and from some of them emerged the loud, tinny music of record players and radios. Most of these stores have either an electric or kerosene refrigerator, and the ice which is saved up in the daytime is amply used after the day's diving is over: frosted snow cones of all colors and tastes are lavishly displayed in the stores. In the evening everybody is on the little main street, which is a path under the coconut palms, with the lagoon ten feet away on one side and the row of huts on the other. Just as in big cities or in suburban areas, people walk and visit and talk shop and amuse themselves.

In Martin's house there was a general reshuffling at bedtime, and once more I lay on a couch on the little porch at the edge of the lagoon. In the vicinity a group of Paumotu music lovers gathered with their instruments, and their singing lasted until three o'clock. It must be said that one never tires of the Paumotu songs. They are plaintive, have peculiar rhythms, and are often quite repetitious; yet there is something very catching about them.

The fresh-water situation on Takapoto is acute during this sudden swell of the population. There are two cisterns in the main village at the end of the lagoon, but every person on the island is rationed to ten liters of water per week (approximately four gallons). The water has to be fetched in containers by canoe, eight miles down the lagoon.

Martin's house abounds with shell. There is shell under the beds, in odd corners, shell in empty copra sacks, shell as ash trays; shell to right and left. Of course he has sold a lot of it, but he wishes to keep some for a rainy day.

I had a long talk with the gendarme and the chief of the island during my stay. I was curious about one thing and unable to get any satisfactory answer: Is there any trace at all of the *African Galley*? I found that, except for the Dutch professor on Oceania studies, I am the only one who is aware of the fact that there ever was an A*frican Galley*.

The next morning Martin took me to the center of the lagoon on a mother-of-pearl diving sortie. This man was an excellent diver. In the tradition of French Oceania diving standards, he went through his series of whistling and his chant, and at nine o'clock in the morning his first dive of the day was one hundred and twenty-two feet below the surface. At the point of observation, the diving had already been in progress for thirty of the sixty days, and a little over a hundred tons had been collected. Yet an unusual fact was that not a solitary pearl had been found this season.

The place Martin had chosen for diving is only twenty yards or so away from one of the coral mushrooms in the middle of the lagoon. If the lagoon were to be drained, these coral formations would be not unlike tall, thin stalactites rising from the bed of the lagoon just up to or slightly below the surface of the water. It is an amazing natural phenomenon, for this is all animal life which keeps reproducing itself century after century and building the coral ever so little at a time.

I walked around this coral head, then swam away from it. At a distance of four or five feet the depth was already forty or fifty feet, and at every foot that you put between yourself and the coral formation the depth increases twenty, thirty, forty feet. The greatest depth of this lagoon is twenty-seven fathoms. Martin informed me that in the village were three women divers who could go to a depth of one hundred and twenty feet.

The shell which comes out of this lagoon is not the largest of the shell available in the Tuamotus, but it comes in fair quantities and ensures a good revenue annually. I would very much like to revisit this island when everything is back to normal and the one hundred and thirty permanent inhabitants go about their lives without the excitement and noise and the hustle and the bustle of the pearling season.

At lunch time the next day, once more our group was gathered in the shabby little dining room behind the Chinese store, and once more it was time for speeches, this time farewells. The crew of the plane as well as myself regretted having to leave so soon. All divers were in before the noon hour today, since they all wanted to see our departure. They would resume their diving as soon as the plane left. At that moment they were scattered around the plane, idling the time away in their canoes and, as a contribution to the festivity of the

occasion, each canoe had a flagpole or a canoe paddle with a pareu attached to it. As explained previously, usually a pareu is hoisted only in the event of an accident during the diving, but today was a festive occasion, and the multicolored pareus in the bright noon sun against the background of the lagoon made a fine spectacle.

The occasion and the thrill of her first airplane ride acted as a balm on the little girl with appendicitis who was paddled out in a canoe to the waiting plane. There were no tears, and she was happy as a child can be as the center of attention. The armrest between two seats on the plane was removed, and she was laid down there ready for transportation to the hospital in Papeete. There was a lot of *"la Orana" "Au revoir"* and handshaking; then finally the hatch closed and the plane's anchor was raised and stowed away. Frame taxied his plane across the lagoon, ready to take off and head for Papeete.

Three days later news reached me through Tom Stone, one of the Mormon missionaries in Papeete, that the little girl from Takapoto wanted to see the Popaa who had stayed at her house. After purchasing a small gift in a Chinese store, I dashed to the Government hospital where I was ushered into a hospital ward of about twenty beds occupied by children of various ages. I had no trouble locating my little friend, and she was more than delighted with the gift which I presented to her. The nurse informed me that the operation had gone off without any complications and that in another week the child would be out of the hospital and would probably wait at the Mormon mission for the next sailing of the schooner for Takapoto.

While I was at her bedside, an old acquaintance of mine happened to be visiting a small friend in the same ward. It was none other than Anna Chevalier, now a little more buxom than twenty-five years earlier when she had starred in the motion picture "Tabu." Anna Chevalier has had a full life since working for Murnau in the film on Bora-Bora. A few years in the Ziegfeld Follies in New York, visits to Paris and the United States, have sophisticated the simple little island girl.

Anna was evidently in her cups—one of her major pitfalls these days—but she had good news. A letter from an associate producer in Hollywood had made her quite happy. Years ago, the only print of the film "Tabu" which Anna Chevalier received from the studio was lost in a fire in her home, and she made a great effort to obtain another. Now the associate producer, remembering her as she was when young and beautiful, offered to send her another copy of "Tabu." After having located the film which was playing in distant Shanghai, he was having a copy made, and by mail he had let Anna know of the package she was soon to receive. Anna was quite excited about this and was already battling the owners of the Bamboo Theater, the Rex

Theater and the Modern Theater to see from which of the three she could get the best deal for a reshowing of her picture.

On my way out of the hospital I ran into another of Tahiti's colorful characters, Emil Gauguin, the son of Paul Gauguin. He has a lame foot caused by a fall from a bicycle which he had—by mistake—removed from its parking place. The rightful owner had been chasing him, when he hit a rock on the road and fell. Emil is a big husky fellow. He shows almost as little resemblance to his father as Tauanui up in the Marquesas does. He lives in the district of Punaauia, thirteen kilometers out of Papeete, and his primary interest is the rooster fights on Sunday afternoons. He is constantly at odds with the law; small, petty incidents continually dog him.

I made my way to the waterfront and boarded the *Moanatae* just a few minutes before her departure for Moorea.

CHAPTER 22

Many pages back I spoke of the bevy of island beauties who were so openly seeking the shelter of my habitation in Moorea. They did not forget me.

She came to me one morning, early, in a canoe from across the Bay—the girl of the note-by-the-bread-boy. I see her now as she pushed the canoe on to the beach and came walking toward me. She was a lovely creation: light-brown skin, wrapped in a red-and-white pareu. Her worldly possessions were in a bundle which consisted of another pareu, the four ends knotted together. In the other hand she held a kitten, and a young white mongrel pup jumped at her side. On her head at a rakish angle was a plain, woven pandanus hat with a crown of fems and a stray flower here and there. It gave her a coquettish look. In addition to the flowers in her hat, she had a red hibiscus above her ear. Her name was Maraeura. It took me almost three days to pronounce it (Mah-ray-ooh-rah) without forethought.

She could cook and catch fish and mend and do laundry very well. According to our civilized standards, she was by no means a *dame du monde*. Actually it would be hard to imagine someone more uncosmopolitan than Maraeura. Costume jewelry she had none, but how could man have improved that splash of color, the flower in her hair, and that big smile? It would indeed have been mockery even to think of an earring or any of our female adornments. She would have felt ill at ease in Joe's Diner or Macy's Coffee Shop, and she could not have squeezed into a size-seven shoe, but to me Maraeura was very wonderful. She could play a guitar and sing the old songs of Moorea. She would jump out of the outrigger when we touched a coral head or the reef; her thick soles never felt a thing. Yet she had a very good, sensitive heart. She went to church every Sunday morning, paddling the canoe in rain or sun, four miles to the village. She could flick a spider or a centipede out of harm's way with a nonchalance as if flicking away a cigarette butt.

Weaknesses she had none. Oh, yes, she liked to go to the village cinema on Saturday nights to see the latest in Moorea: "Rebecca," or "The Three Musketeers," or "Aloma of the South Seas." It was a road show, all right—Mondays in Maharepa; Thursdays in Hapiti; and Saturdays in Papetoai. Same truck and equipment in all three villages.

She loved to sit on the porch of the house with my binoculars and look across the bay. She would comment: "Oh, Tahiata is tending his vanilla," or "Siki is fishing by the shore." It seemed to give her a thrill to see what was going on over there from over here. There was never

any argument with Maraeura, and domestic problems were unknown. The main things which cause arguments among people living together did not exist with us: politics, religion, the arts, finances were all mysteries to her. But she would know exactly what lure to use for which fish, and at what phase of the moon to go out or stay within the reef, or which shoal to do the day's or the night's fishing on. She could climb a tree and fill her bag with avocados or mangos in no time at all. When I would go to Papeete on my monthly foraging trips, most of it canned goods, I would ask her: "Now, Maraeura, what can I bring you back?" The answer was always the same, "Ato." (Nothing.) "I have everything I want." Yet I never failed to bring her some little gift: a piece of pareu cloth; a bottle of inexpensive eau de cologne, a carton of Chesterfields. The big, happy smile which meant thanks was ample return; and so Maraeura brought happiness in that little grass shack at the foot of mighty Opunohu in Papetoai Bay.

I'll never forget the day the news reached me of my impending departure. My stay was coming to an end. I had not said a word to her about it yet. Still she came up to me, and with both her brown hands on my cheeks she asked me, "When are you leaving?" Then tears appeared, blurring her large brown eyes.

One day shortly afterward the large schooner came into the bay to pick me up. My few possessions were already in the whaleboat. Maraeura was standing by the outrigger canoe wearing the same bright red-and-white pareu and a small bunch of fragrant Tiare Tahiti in her hair. She was very sad and was fast losing a hopeless battle. Very few words were or could be spoken by either of us at the moment. I tried gallantly to reassure her that some day I'd be back. Her answer was, "My *tane*, do not lie to me. When you leave me I will never see you again." As I stepped into the waiting whaleboat, I heard her choking with a sudden flood of sorrow and tears. I tried to look at the breaking surf on the reef as I had so often done, but all I could see was a blur. The whaleboat cast off, and I looked back as the gates of my Paradise were closing behind me; it was an unforgettably beautiful day and Moorea never looked better to me. I can still see Maraeura on the beach making a hopeless gesture intended to be a farewell wave of her arm, the white mongrel dog beside her. Soon features were no longer recognizable, but I know that the little red-and-white-and-brown dot on the beach was Maraeura waving to me.

CHAPTER 23

Once more I was crossing the Pacific, the wrong way this time. My heart was heavy, and I was mentally rebelling at the adjustments which lay ahead of me. I was grateful for one thing: I had really lived, and these last two years in the South Pacific had made up for some of the leaner periods of my life. It seemed now that the question was not whether I could adapt myself to the Polynesians, but how could I ever settle down again to my previous life of "normalcy"? I felt some consolation in the thought of the millions who are never able to realize their dreams and who live their monotonous, everyday existence from the cradle to the grave, and I was grateful for the chance which fortune had shoved my way, even if it had made a changed individual of me. I would advise anyone with similar inclinations to do the South Sea Islands as the last thing in life, for after that nothing else matters too much. Yes, I have undergone a mental change; my standards and goals are different than they were a few years ago. Things which I appreciated at that time—position, money, prestige—have become secondary, replaced by those things which give true happiness. If I was half a dreamer or an escapist before my Polynesian wanderings, I am even more so now. My goal is only to return there some day. Already I am scheming on ways and means to achieve this ambition, as James Hilton's Conway did in *Lost Horizon*.

As I wander into the huge May Company Department Store in Los Angeles to purchase some article of clothing necessary for my "reconversion to civilization," I look around at the shopping throng. People battling for bargains, pale-faced salesgirls and clerks who, day in and day out, punch their time clocks and go through a mechanized, automatic life. Believe me, I bear no contempt for them; on the contrary, nothing but tolerance. I would like to take one of these aside and explain the incomparable beauty of the Tuamotu lagoons. But, alas, how does one explain such a thing to the uninitiated? One just does not try. One keeps quiet and says to oneself, "What is the use? They wouldn't understand me." How can I explain to these people what it is really to live a free life? The message I feel like disclosing to my automaton friends is not merely about the beauty of a Tuamotu lagoon, but also about that very pleasing break from a disturbed and nervous world and the glimpse of a dream. It is like having a figurative heart loosened from the shackles of intellectual conscience. I do not mean merely the relaxation which the tourist and the trader in the South Seas permit themselves, but rather that deep sense of the

innermost self responding to the awe-inspiring relation between nature and man. It is not the banalities of Papeete which attracted me, but the deeper contact with island life which I was able to establish and which was responsible for my readjusted outlook. The simple pleasures of such an existence are sufficient to make one rejoice at having escaped artificiality and entered into nature free of stress and strain. It thrills one with a sense of rejuvenation and gives renewed freedom of mind and body. It is like the rediscovery, if this is possible, of the laws and rhythms of a primitive age, the earmarks of an innocent world.

The shirt which I am purchasing has mother-of-pearl buttons on it. I finger these gently while my mind leaps across the miles. I am rudely awakened from my short dream. “Yes, sir! Genuine mother-of-pearl buttons,” says the clerk, as if reading my thoughts. I wonder how much of my mind he really was able to read. Once more I am with Rotui and his helper on his delightful lagoon diving for the pearl shell. I would like to explain to this clerk just where the mother-of-pearl came from, of the dangers associated with its acquisition, and the natural life on the atolls. But in the hustle and bustle of a mid-July sale in the May store there is no time to pause and discourse on mother-of-pearl with clerks. I wander outside once more. Hordes are waiting for the change of a traffic light. As it changes to green, like a flock of sheep everyone scurries across the street.

A crippled blind man sits in the shade, his hat between his deformed legs, depending for his daily bread on the charity of others. Again my mind wanders to those happy islands where no one is ever hungry and no one ever begs. As I drive through some of the Skid Row streets in the downtown area, I revolt at some of the decay of the West which has taken hold of many of my fellow human beings. It is hard to believe that there are men and women in this city who probably, year in and year out, go through life never seeing a patch of green grass or the blue expanse of a lagoon.

I enter one of the newer immense supermarkets with acres of merchandise attractively displayed, right and left; and then I think of my friend, Lai Sang, “commergant générale et boulanger,” in his little village of Papetoai. I stop at a counter where, among other things, are vanilla beans, each bean separately packed in a transparent plastic container. The price is one dollar per bean. If there is such a thing as smelling mentally, I catch the whiff of the drying vanilla in the backs of the Chinese stores in Papetoai and Cook’s Bays.

Not far from this market is a tunnel from which emerges a perpetual roar. Accustomed as I am to looking in the distance and seeing the white surf crashing upon the reef, I raise my head only to find the roar is merely that of traffic. People rushing here, people

rushing there.

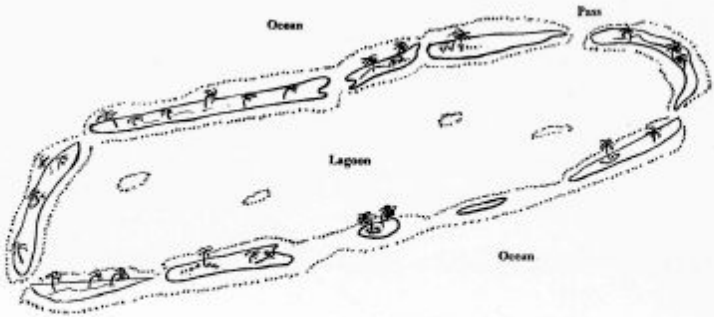
I find it very difficult to readjust. Frankly, I don't intend to readjust any more than is necessary. My friends and I do not speak the same language any more. I find it hard to tell them what it was like.

How does one react when a friend whom you have not seen in three years asks with a leer, "How about the women down there? What's all this I hear about these Tahitian women?" One avoids a direct answer. It would seem like sacrilege to divulge the truth—to lay bare on the table for the rest of the world to judge those brown-skinned creatures with their long black hair, their flashing eyes, their ever-pleasing manners and inborn, proud softness of bearing. So you avoid the question, because in your heart you have cherished memories.

Very much the same happens when people ask, "How was Tahiti?" Again, how does one explain the wonderful, simple island living, the Port of Papeete, those very characteristic inter-island schooners and, above all, those unforgettable lagoons? I have tried a few times but gave up very fast when I was suddenly interrupted with, "Oh, by the way, not to change the subject, but Mrs. So and So, you remember her, she had a baby and later on her husband ..." or some similar evidence of lack of appreciation. I have succeeded a few times only. When I perceive that a person is genuinely interested, I take him to my home, show him my collection of shells from the different atolls, and pictures of some of the things I have seen as well as some of the many charts I have gathered. Then as I talk there are moments when I gratefully realize that I am bringing to him just a little understanding of what I have experienced.

Now I have succeeded in putting more than two thousand miles between me and the "evils of a large city," for I am once more on my way to the South Pacific, pausing in Honolulu.

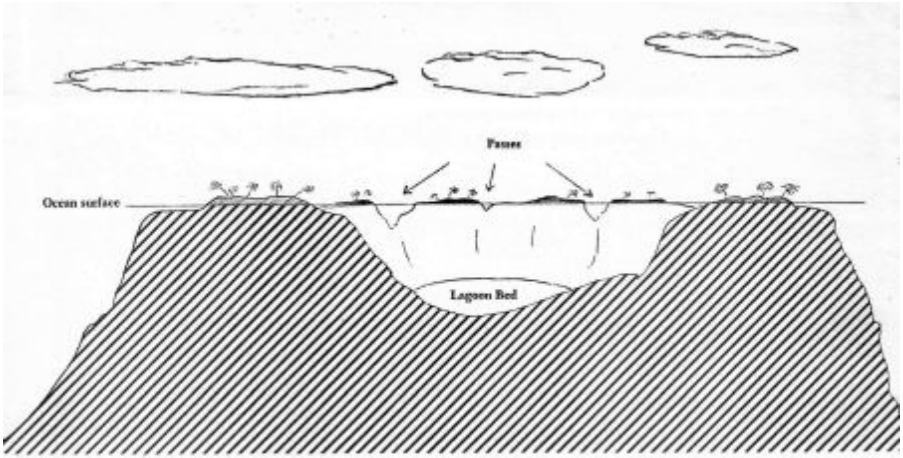
If this volume and its pictures were able to lift you from your daily surroundings to the shores of those delightful islands of French Oceania where I found so much happiness, then I feel that the message from me to you has achieved its purpose. And to those of you who will dash to your nearest travel bureau in search of information about the South Seas, I sincerely wish "*Ia Orana Oe*."



Typical view of an Atoll from above

Dimensions: Length 10 miles, width 3 miles

Width of Atoll rim 300 yds. Depth of Lagoon 25 fathoms



Cross section of an Atoll